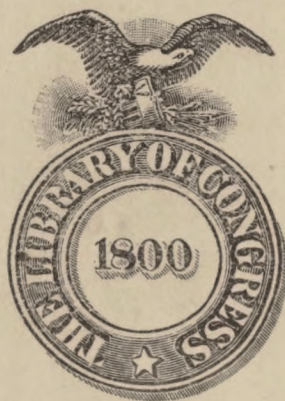


THE
VILLAGE
OF
HIDE
&
SEEK

BINGHAM THOBURN WILSON



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THE VILLAGE OF HIDE AND SEEK.



"The now smiling vagabond stood bowing and scraping in the middle of the sunbaked road."—See page 14.

THE VILLAGE OF HIDE AND SEEK

BY
BINGHAM THOBURN WILSON

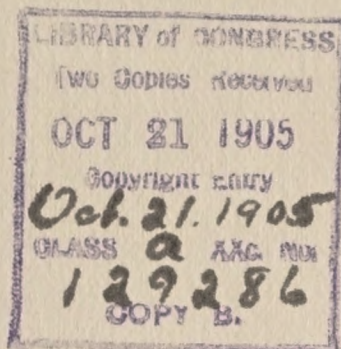
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Dedication.

TO THE CHILDREN OF POVERTY AND RAGS. TO THE
HOUSEHOLD OF SORROW AND BURDENSOME CARE.
TO THE LIVES IN THE SHADOW OF THE DARK GAUNT
FORM OF WOE. TO THOSE WHOSE EARS HAVE BEEN
ATTUNED TO THE HOLLOW, MOCKING VOICE OF
GRIEF. TO THE HUMBLEST OF THE HUMBLE, THE
POOR; THE VERY POOR. AND MAY THIS STORY
PROVE TO BE STARLIGHT IF NOT SUNSHINE.

VERY RESPECTFULLY,

THE AUTHOR.

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THE VILLAGE OF HIDE AND SEEK

CHAPTER I

“HIS HIGHNESS,” THE VAGABOND

ON a bright sunny day in the middle of the month of August, a merry group of gaily dressed children were romping upon the green lawn of a country place, that, from its well kept and cleanly surroundings, could not have been mistaken for any other than the home of some prosperous and perhaps retired gentleman of wealth and refinement.

The old-fashioned stone house, with its wide porch and heavily carved wooden columns green-

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coated with climbing ivy, rose amid the stately trees of the lawn, until it seemed lost in a bower of shadowy foliage. The low, thatch-roofed out-buildings and long lines of far-reaching fence, carefully coated with fresh whitewash, stood glistening in the sunlight, quite in harmony with the polished marble window sills of the great stone mansion.

Standing in the very centre of the scene, like some still lingering remnant of the long gone and almost forgotten past, arose the tall, rustic arm of an old-fashioned well-sweep, that raised or lowered a moss-covered, old oaken bucket, filled to overflowing and dripping wet with cool, clear water, not unfrequently visited by this gamboling group of merry children both during and after their play.

As the children rested for a moment beneath the sheltering arms of an old oak tree, they were much surprised to behold the form of a wandering

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vagabond ambling along the dusty road. His hat was well drawn down over his eyes to avoid the glaring rays of the mid-day sun. Over his shoulder and made fast to the end of a crooked stick, that might have answered as well for a defence as for a staff, hung his sum total of earthly possessions, tied carefully into a small bundle and as carefully hid from view within the folds of a red bandanna handkerchief.

A passing glance only was needed to tell that the wanderer was weary; and as his eyes, glistening with envy, beheld the cool shade of the trees, and the still more inviting bucket above the well, that, half-filled and leaking, hung suspended in mid-air, he halted his weary pace in the road near the gate and beckoned the children to approach.

No second invitation was needed. The boys, more daring and venturesome, bounded toward

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him with a merry shout and were soon standing on the edge of the lawn near the wanderer; but the little girls, like so many timid fawns of the forest, with a feeling more of fear than of curiosity, lingered tardily behind; and it was some time before they joined their less cautious companions.

He was a curious looking, but quite jolly vagabond indeed; and although his face was begrimed and smeared with mingled perspiration and dust, his eyes shone with a merry, good-natured twinkle, as he doffed his well worn and dusty black hat and bowed with an air of politeness, quite unknown to the common everyday tramp of the highways of the world.

One of the children laughingly exclaimed:

“Where are you going?”

And another: “Where did you come from?”

And still a third: “Where is your home?”

And so on, until the now smiling vagabond,

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waiting for a chance to reply, stood bowing and scraping in the middle of the sun-baked road as he calmly received volley after volley of almost unanswerable questions.

“Well!” he exclaimed at last, as the children became suddenly silent, “You ask me where I am from and where I am going, so now let me say: just at present I am from everywhere in general and bound nowhere in particular!”

And he began pounding the dust from his body and limbs with his old hat, as if wishing to make himself look presentable, even if out in the middle of a hot, dusty roadway; and looking up with a longing glance, he asked permission to obtain a drink of water from the well on the lawn.

The big gate was still closed to “His Most Royal Highness,” and as the mere thought of his entering the lawn dawned upon the minds of the now silent children, they drew back in affright and

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with solemn faces ; nor would they think of granting the stranger's request until finally one little fellow called his companions together for a moment, as he almost pleadingly said :

“It is wrong to deny a poor man a drink of water. He is weary and perhaps far from home, while God gives us the water so freely. Beside, he cannot take the shade of these trees away with him when he goes, so, while he rests on the lawn, I will bring him a drink from the well myself.”

And with a light foot, but a much lighter heart, the boy bounded away in haste, while the weary “Knight of the Road” entered the shadow of a big maple tree on the lawn and stood waiting for him to return.

As he gulped down the cool, refreshing water in a manner as though famished, he blinked his bright sparkling eyes in evidence of much relish ; then casting a thankful glance upon the face of

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his new found friend, he turned toward him with a smile as he said :

“My little lad, for your kind act to a weary and thirsty man let me say; if you will gather your little friends about me under the shade of this tree, I will tell you an interesting story, which, if you will listen carefully, may give you something of my past wanderings as well as an answer to some of the questions you asked of me while I was out in the road.”

Without a word of reply, the children, anxious to know what the stranger's story might be, sank here and there upon the grass, as the vagabond thus began his strange tale.

CHAPTER II

“AUNT TWADDLES”

“As I paused in the middle of the road near the gate,” began the vagabond, “this manly little fellow who so kindly brought me a drink from the well, wanted to know where I came from. In answer to his question let me say: I am, as you see, a friendless vagabond, wandering hither and thither over the face of the earth. But think not that I never had a home; for although I may not look it, I once had a dear mother, just as each one of you has, who, when I was a baby kissed me and rocked me to sleep every night with a sweet lullaby. But that was a long time ago, and it is little wonder that, as you now gaze upon me, you are anxious to know who I am and whence I came.

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“Now I might be an earthly prince in disguise for aught that you know, though I’m not. Yet right here let me say, I *am* the son of a King, for we are *all* the children of God and our earthly end is alike in this dust that some of you children at first so pretended to scorn as you saw it all over my clothes. So from this on, remember, we are only of the dust; and the babies of satins and silks, all humbled at last, shall lie down and sleep side by side with the children of tatters and rags.

“Be that as it may; I was born in the village of Harpers Ferry on the banks of the fair Shenandoah River, where lofty mountains rise and overhang with rugged cliffs that seem about to fall into the deep valley below; and where, in order to get into the town at all, the trains pass through a dark tunnel in the mountains, and leaping with shrill whistle across the long span of a great steel bridge, slow down and stop at a quaint, stone station, so

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closely surrounded by tall mountains on all sides that a traveller might think himself at the very end of the world.

“ It is here that the wild Shenandoah empties its foaming waters into the Potomac River, (for be it remembered that the two streams were joined in Holy wedlock by the Indians long, long ago), and mingling their currents in loving embrace, they leap onward through a pass in the mountains and together journey joyfully eastward toward the sea.

“ As the stranger stands upon the platform at the little stone station, and gazes far across the Shenandoah River, he cannot help noticing a dark path, or roadway, leading straight up the face of a steep cliff; and long will he wonder how it could ever be possible to climb that path, for it stands almost straight up and down.

“ Right here let me say there are but three

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persons on earth who can truthfully boast of having once included that path as a part of their journey; while strangest of all is the fact that one of these was an old woman, so awkward and fat that she looked to be almost helpless, while the other two, at the time of ascent, were mere children.

“ For many years prior to the time of my story, (how long, nobody ever could tell), there dwelt an old woman somewhere up in these mountains, and unless something has happened to her recently she is living there still.

“ She was a strange looking creature and from her jolly, good nature and laughing, happy way, had grown in weight until she must have tipped the scales at fully five hundred pounds.

“ She did not look in the least like a mountain climber, nor in fact hardly able to mount a short flight of stairs; yet she was a quite frequent

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wanderer up and down the opposite bank of the river, where most of her time was spent in gathering wild herbs on the rough side of the mountain, or along the fertile bed of the Shenandoah.

“When the great bag, which she always carried slung over her shoulder, was filled with herbs almost to bursting, she would start at the bottom of this high cliff, and, aided by the scrubby bushes that grew from the dark fissures in the mountain’s time scarred face, she would manage in some mysterious way to drag her full five hundred weight with its load to the top, and then disappear in the mountain wood-land above.

“It was not only a tiresome, but likewise a dangerous journey, for there were few places where she could catch her toes in the steep rock; and as she climbed slowly upward, and with much difficulty felt for each foothold, her great body swayed and staggered upon the face of the cliff,

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while she puffed and blew from her toil so loudly that her heavy breathing could plainly be heard far across in the village of Harpers Ferry.

“ Never did she go up the cliff but that great boulders would break loose under her ponderous tread, and tumbling headlong with mighty bound, would dash down the steep mountain-side and land with a roaring crash in the bed of the river below, where to this day they may be seen choking the tide of the stream in a great rocky mass.

“ In many ways this strange woman was more odd than she looked. She was not very high, but so terribly spread out that she was equally as tall when lying down as when standing up; and if, like a turtle, she might have drawn in her feet and her head, she could have rolled about over the ground like a great ball—but of course she was not a turtle.

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“ The garments, too, that she wore, both in make and material, were strange to look upon. Her skirt, which could never have been made for another, was fully a foot too long. It entirely concealed her feet, which could not have been small, and so caused her to stumble and trip that often indeed have I wondered how she could get along with her big bag of herbs over a level road, much less up a path on the face of the cliff, that even the bravest of hunters and mountain-men dared not attempt to climb. Thus she went stumbling along in her own silent, industrious way.

“ And now comes the strangest thing of all about this wonderful, fat woman.

“ Many are the grown people that have passed her while busy at her labor of herb gathering, yet not for a moment would she stop work to talk with any of them. If they smiled, she might

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look up and smile in reply ; but if they asked her a question she would answer it with such an uncivil grunt that they were glad to pass rapidly along on their way.

“ But should she happen to meet with a group of gay children, this strange, fat woman was sure to drop her big bag of herbs, and pausing for a long jolly chat, would unbosom her goodness of heart and draw from her ponderous pockets handful after handful of candy and pop-corn balls, taffy and chocolate drops, the like of which for sweetness and flavor, no mortal man had ever made.

“ Nor was she in the least inclined to be stingy for she would give the children as much of her sweets as they could eat and then bid them good-bye with a kiss and a parting blessing. For so many years had she thus kindly treated the children that they watched for her coming and

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going day after day and were ever on the lookout to greet her, with tears of joy in their eyes.

“ The name of this fat woman was ‘ Twaddles ; ’ and as nobody thereabout knew just whether she was a Miss or a Mrs., the children had nicknamed her ‘ Auntie,’ although that might have been as big a mistake as either of the other two names. But it sounded motherly and sweet to her ears, and, as its mention was sure to bring forth an abundance of bon-bons and candies, all of the grown people as well as the children called her ‘ Aunt Twaddles.’

“ Where did she come from ? you ask. Well, for many years nobody ever could tell. Some claimed that she lived in a nest with the eagles far off in the mountains. Others, that she dwelt alone with some half grown cubs in the heart of a dark bear den, where the foot of a hunter had never passed ; while some even vowed that at

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night all the humming birds kept guard while she slept far back in a cave in the rocks.

“ Old Nimrod, the hunter, declared, (and he had spent his whole life in the mountains), that she was ‘Queen of the Witches’ and lived in the dark hollow of a great tree, far down in a deep rocky glen, where panthers and owls with wildcats and rattlesnakes dwell. Once when he saw her, he said she was leading a pack of fierce wolves along on the side of the mountain; and again she was holding a live panther close to her breast and rocking it to sleep in her arms.

“ At any rate, wherever she lived, so marvelous indeed was she skilled in the art of making candy, that her praises were sung by the children far and near; and strangest of all was the fact that, should you once eat a little bite of it, the sweetness and flavor it left in your mouth lasted for over a week, while its memory lasted a lifetime.

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Years might pass silently away and the children who had once tasted of 'Aunt Twaddles' candy grow up and be married, yet they could never forget it, though they tried; while stranger still was the fact that a mere recollection was sure to bring tears to the eyes, nor could one cease crying until he went home and forgot about it.

"In proof of this part of my tale let me say; I remember one day as I stood quite hidden from view amid the green alder-berry bushes that grew on the bank of the river, I beheld 'Aunt Twaddles' coming slowly down the edge of the stream. Her big bag was heavily laden with herbs, and, as the sun was quite high in the heavens, she paused in the shade of a tree near the foot of the steep path for a moment of rest before starting up the dangerous face of the cliff, for she needed all of her strength to go up.

"Just as she had comfortably seated herself on

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a log, I noticed a little old man tottering across the long foot-bridge that led over from the village. He was hurrying along, rapping his feet and his staff on the boards as fast as his seventy-odd years would allow. His long, snow-white hair waved on the midsummer breeze, while the long flaps of his old-fashioned coat were dangling about his thin, wobbly legs in a manner too funny for anything.

“ As he drew near, I noticed that there were real tears in his eyes, and his withered old cheeks were much stained where they had fallen. Carefully I watched him as he drew near, and, with a feeling of deepest respect bowed low as he said in a tremulous, squeaky voice :

“ ‘ Good morning, Aunt Twaddles. Would you mind giving an old, life-long friend another bit of your candy? ’

“ In a second ‘ Aunt Twaddles ’ arose.

“ ‘ No sir ! ’ she cried, with a frown, ‘ I gave you

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plenty of it, Sir, when you were a good little boy. Tobacco seems to be your favorite candy now from the appearance of your stained white beard, so you get none of mine.'

"And she began to empty her pockets that were filled with sweet, juicy bon-bons, over the brink and down into the stream; and shouldering her big bag of herbs, prepared to start up the face of the cliff. The little old man went tottering back over the foot-bridge to the village; nor is there any doubt that he went home and cried over the thought of her candy and kept crying until he forgot about it.

"And now," said the vagabond, "lest the thought of 'Aunt Twaddles'' candy brings tears to my eyes, for I have eaten some of it myself, let us pause for a moment while we more comfortably seat ourselves before I proceed with the story."

The almost vertical rays of the mid-day sun

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were pouring a merciless fire upon a portion of the charmed circle and the story-teller with his group of merry children was not slow in selecting a new spot further in under the protecting branches of the tree. The children had been so absorbed in the wonderful tale of the wanderer that they had failed to notice the intense heat until, down the faces of some of the smaller ones, drops of perspiration were flowing like tears.

Amid a clamorous shout of "Go on! Go on!" uttered in concert by the delighted children, it was thus the wanderer continued.

CHAPTER III

THE PATH UP THE CLIFF

“IN the Village of Harpers Ferry, there stood for many years an old Inn;—so old that no one knew its age. It was built in the days before saw-mills were known, when all the lumber was either split out or sawed out by hand. The weather-stained boards on its rickety sides were covered with moss from the eaves down to the ground, while the shingles of the roof were so twisted and warped out of place that they afforded little or no protection to the dwellers within.

“Travel was light in Harpers Ferry during the time of which I speak, and the lack of good business, together with his miserly nature, kept the

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old Inn-keeper peevish and cross ; so much so that he was despised by everyone about the village.

“ He was a wheezy little old man with a wooden leg, the rough oaken stump of which, with its shafts and mysterious harness, was a source of much wonder as well as merriment to the children of the neighborhood ; while the little old man himself seemed to be just withering away and drying up on his feet, instead of growing weak and infirm, as is the usual course with most things that are old.

“ Two bright little orphan grandchildren answered his cross, squeaky call, and as their father had been dead ever since they were babies, and their dear mother had died some two years before, they lived with the cross old man at the Inn, where they received a scolding or whipping much oftener than they did a good dinner. Never was he heard to speak a kind word to either of them.

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“Through the early part of every spring this old Inn-keeper would suffer dreadfully from asthma, which is a kind of disease that chokes people just as if they were strangling all the time. During these bad spells of smothering he would drive the poor children off into the mountains to gather wild pennyroyal, which he burned under a funnel and inhaled the smoke to relieve his wheezing during the night, for without it he could not sleep. Many indeed were the whippings they had received at the hands of the cruel old Inn-keeper just because they failed to find enough of the herb in the mountain to suit his suffering needs.

“The bright sun was warm on this particular spring morning although the frost had not yet departed from some of the deep mountain glens. The old Inn-keeper called the two children from their play in the village street and bade them hasten away over the river to search for penny-

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royal. He did not forget to threaten them with an angry frown before they left, as he loudly vowed that he expected to spend a bad night with the asthma, and solemnly declared that, should they return without a goodly supply of penny-royal, he would whip them both soundly, deny them their suppers and make them sleep without covers on the floor of the attic,—a place that swarmed with both rats and mice.

“With this terrible threat still ringing in their ears, the two children hastened away toward the river and with much fear in their hearts started across the long foot-bridge toward the mountains.

“Arthur, the boy, was eleven years old, while his little sister Maud, a beautiful but shy little thing, had hardly turned nine. They journeyed along hand in hand and when midway the stream, they looked back just as the old Inn-keeper entered the Inn, then paused for a moment to

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glance over the wide flowing stream and look down into its clear waters for bass,—which, I might add, was their principal sport on a hot summer day.

“Far up the tide, a fish-hawk sailed silently round and round over the foamy water, searching the more shallow places with a keen, piercing eye, and looking no doubt for its dinner. A long-necked blue heron, awakened by the loud, clattering footsteps and shouting voices of the two children, arose from beneath a dark tangle of water-elms that grew near the farther end of the foot-bridge, and, with lazy wings, and dragging its slim legs over the water as if it were too much trouble to lift them up under its body, it went on up the edge of the stream and disappeared from sight along the dark shore. High over all and circling with mysterious ease, a bald eagle held stately repose in the sky.

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“‘Come, Maudie,’ exclaimed little Arthur at last. ‘Let us make haste, for the journey may be tiresome and long.’ And hand in hand they hastened across the bridge.

“As they came to the edge of the woods they began their search for pennyroyal. This herb was not plentiful so early in the spring and the side of the mountain was steep and rough.

“Bright, fancy-formed ferns were growing here and there from beneath the edge of the big rocks, and johnny-jump-ups were lifting their tiny blue heads aloft to the fresh morning breeze, wherever an occasional dead tree allowed the rays of the sun to fall unshadowed upon the rich soil below. All through the woodland they noticed the poison-oak vine, as it slowly began its long summer climb up the trunks of the stately oak trees.

“‘Alas!’ thought the two children as they journeyed along, ‘there is no pennyroyal.’

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“Then looking up with affright at the sound of a familiar voice, they were greatly surprised, for there stood ‘Aunt Twaddles’ before them.

“At once the object of their journey was forgotten and they buried their grief for a time as the kind-hearted old lady drew forth a handful of her sweet candy, and all three sank upon a green, moss-covered mound for a rest and a feast and a chat.

“When they were comfortably seated, ‘Aunt Twaddles’ glanced carefully about her, and, as she measured the moss-covered mound with one sweep of the eye, she suddenly exclaimed:

“‘Perhaps this mound is the grave of some long dead but great Indian chief;’ and while the two children sat gazing about, she continued: ‘But he can’t scalp us now, children! He can’t scalp us now!’

“And with a loud, harsh laugh that rang

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through the woodland, she leaned her fat back against the trunk of a tall tree that towered ever so high above them.

“‘And where are you going, my dears?’ at last she inquired.

“‘After pennyroyal for grandfather,’ replied little Arthur, and his words were followed by a deep sigh.

“‘Have you found any?’ she asked, as her fat face lighted up with a broad smile that drove all thoughts of sorrow and care from their minds.

“‘Not yet, Ma’am!’ exclaimed little Maud. ‘I don’t think it has come up out of the ground, for we have searched so far very carefully.’

“‘Aunt Twaddles’ laughed outright. ‘Oh yes, it has, dear,’ she replied. ‘Pennyroyal is the second flavoring herb of the spring-time.’

“And she reached her hand down deep into her

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herb bag and drew forth quite a quantity of fresh plucked pennyroyal and laid it before their envious gaze on the ground.

“‘And what is the first flavoring herb, Aunt Twaddles?’ inquired little Arthur, as he glanced up from the pennyroyal.

“‘Mint, darling,’ she replied with a laugh, and continued: ‘On the south side of the mountain, where the springs moisten and soften the soil, it lifts its green head out of the earth as soon as the frost leaves the ground.’

“She lowered her hand to her big pocket as she ceased speaking and drew from its mighty depth two great, round pop-corn balls, that were dripping with honey and of the deep crimson color of ripe cherries. Placing one in the hand of each of the children, she glanced down upon them with a happy smile, as she exclaimed:

“‘There, darlings. These are flavored with

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mint that I gathered only yesterday. Taste them and see what you think of the flavor.'

"The two children were delighted with the sweet gift, but though it pleased them greatly, they could not keep their envious eyes from the pennyroyal, for they knew that the time thus spent in delay meant a terrible whipping and a much more-to-be-dreaded night with the rats and mice in the attic.

"Seeming to notice the troubled look on their little faces, 'Aunt Twaddles' exclaimed:

" 'Now, darlings, I know these mountains as well as you know yonder streets of the village; and if you will take a short journey with me, I will gather you enough pennyroyal to last the wheezy, old Inn-keeper for the rest of his life.' And without waiting for them to reply, she gathered her big bag of herbs into her arms and arose, as if ready to start.

"Little Arthur looked up, amazed at her words,

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while Maud could scarcely believe her ears, so great was the promise of her dear, old, kind-hearted friend. Well did they recall the long, sorrowful journeys they had often made into the mountains in a vain search for the scarce herb;—journeys that were followed by terrible beatings. The mere thought of gathering enough pennyroyal to last their cruel old grandfather for the rest of his life made their little hearts fairly leap with joy.”

“‘Come, Maudie,’ cried Arthur, as he leaped to his feet, ‘let us go.’

“In a second the children were standing beside ‘Aunt Twaddles’ who, after shouldering her big bag of herbs, led the way.

“They journeyed along down the bank of the river past the end of the foot-bridge that led from the village, when, pausing at the foot of the dangerous path on the face of the cliff, ‘Aunt Twaddles’ rested her herb-bag on the ground for a mo-

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ment, and, glancing first at the tall mountain and then at the children, she exclaimed, with a somewhat doubtful shake of her head:

“ ‘It’s a pretty stiff climb, children! It’s a pretty stiff climb! But come on, let’s go up!’ ”

“ Had ‘Aunt Twaddles’ asked the two children to rise like two eagles and soar high over the tops of the mountains, it would not have seemed to them more of a task than to walk up the bald face of that cliff; and for a long time they stood gazing upon ‘Aunt Twaddles’ as if they thought she had gone completely out of her head.”

“ Little Arthur suddenly exclaimed:

“ ‘Why, Aunt Twaddles, we could never go up there.’ ”

“ As the children glanced at her face, they noticed a strange look in her eyes that startled them. Was it the look of an evil one seeking to lure two innocent children to certain death amid the cruel

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rocks of the mountain? Or was it the look of the witch that Old Nimrod, the hunter, had so often told them about as they sat at his feet by the fire in the old inn? That look that charmed wildcats and panthers and snakes into doing her will?

“Without further delay she shouted with a frown.

“‘Oh yes, you can, children. You shall go up with me. How often have I gone up this path with double your weight as a load!’

“And gathering the thick twill of her skirt into a fold, she placed it tightly within the clasp of Arthur’s hands, at the same time saying :

“‘Come, Maudie, take hold by the side of your brother and hold fast.’

“And before the two frightened children could realize what they had done, they were high up on the side of the cliff and did not dare to let go.”

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“When they had climbed somewhat higher than the church spire that towered aloft over the village across the river, a fisherman, going to raise his nets, beheld them; and raising a shout of alarm, it was not long before the street in the village was filled with excited people. Men yelled with hoarse voices, pleading with ‘Aunt Twaddles’ to come down, but their voices sounded faintly upon the ears of the children, who hung dangling from the end of ‘Aunt Twaddles’ skirt, high up in the air.

“The old, one-legged Inn-keeper hastened away, pounding his peg-leg on the boards of the bridge, in a vain effort to get over to where his squeaky voice might be heard; but without pausing to heed the tumult below, ‘Aunt Twaddles’ continued on up the face of the cliff, constantly warning the two children to ‘Hold fast!’

“Old Jonas, the fisherman, with dripping fish net gathered under his arms, ran with all his might

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over the long foot-bridge and down the opposite bank, where strong men, with pale faces, aided him in stretching it at the base of the cliff, to catch, as he said, the lifeless and mangled bodies of the two children in case they should fall.

“ Old Nimrod, the hunter, came tottering out of the bar-room at the inn, his long trusty rifle in hand, renewing his vow that ‘ Aunt Twaddles ’ was a witch, as he took rest on the rail of the bridge, firmly resolved to shoot her in case the children should let go. With eagle eye he gazed along the polished barrel of his gun and covered the sight-sickening climb with an unfaltering aim.

“ Out in the village street, women stood crying and wringing their hands, while strong men turned white at the sight of the fat woman, swaying and wabbling from side to side in her effort to get up the face of the mountain.

“ From the loud sound of her puffing and blow-

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ing, she seemed almost exhausted. Now she would stumble and totter as if about to fall, when, suddenly grasping with desperate hand a stout, scrubby bush, or a ledge of the broken rock, she would steady herself for a time and by the merest chance gain a fortunate foothold.

“Even the dogs began howling everywhere throughout the village. Every house stood wide-open and deserted. Someone entered the old village church and began slowly tolling the bell, the sound of which seemed to add a doleful appeal to Heaven for the safety and care of the children.

“Slower and slower, weaker and weaker, yet onward and upward, ‘Aunt Twaddles’ toiled on the face of the cliff, when suddenly one loud moan of horror swept from the parched throats of the multitude as ‘Aunt Twaddles,’ by accident, stepped on the end of her long skirt and reeling from the face of the rock, started to fall. Men turned from the

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horrible sight and sank to their knees, while over in the village women fell helpless into each other's arms for support and turned from the sickening scene.

"The crack of a rifle rang out on the air from the end of the foot-bridge and a puff of blue dust arose from the face of the cliff just over 'Aunt Twaddles'' head, where the bullet had shattered the rock.

"Loud shouted the voice of Old Jonas, the fisherman, 'Stretch the net tight, men! Stretch the net tight! They are falling!' While strong limbs steadied themselves and firm hands drew tight on the meshes of stout twine.

"But Fate favors the brave who have presence of mind. 'Aunt Twaddles' laid firm hold on the arm of a deep-rooted bush, and, as she drew her swaying form close to the mountain, the frightened children, swung far out in mid air, like the pen-

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dulum of a clock, and then heavily back against the cliff. Still they held firmly on to her dress.

“Louder and louder the people now renewed their cries for ‘Aunt Twaddles’ to come down; but to attempt to descend in her weary condition meant certain death to all.

“Onward and upward she continued; and while the people below were suffering the anguish of suspense, with one last weary reach she laid firm hold on an overhanging arm of a dogwood tree that hung from above and, with a deep sigh of relief, drew both herself and the children to safety on top of the cliff.

“A murmur of joy went up from the dry, hoarse throats of the men at the base of the mountain, while women sank fainting far across in the streets of the village. Strong men broke down and wept under the spell of excitement. Old Nimrod, the hunter, ceased ramming the charge in his gun, and

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Jonas, the fisherman, shouldered his fish net; but he trembled so from excitement that he could not carry it home. The slow, solemn toll of the church bell turned into one long, loud ring of joy.

“A wild shout from high up in the air echoed and re-echoed over the broad valley below. Far up on the side of the mountain, the people beheld ‘Aunt Twaddles’ wildly waving her sun-bonnet and lifting the children into plain view. In a moment she lowered them again in the shade of a tree and then sank for a rest at their side.

“As the children sat gazing about on the beautiful scene below, they could plainly see the bent form of the old inn-keeper. He was rattling his peg-leg back over the bridge, and as he hobbled along he was shaking his head with an air of anxiety, thinking no doubt about the safety of the children, left to the mercy of a witch on the side of the mountain.

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“ ‘Mercy!’ exclaimed ‘Aunt Twaddles’ with a deep, weary sigh, ‘we will take a good rest before we go on, for that was a hard climb.’

“ And now while ‘Aunt Twaddles’ and the two children are resting under the shade of a tree on the side of the mountain, we will rest for a moment, and I will thank you for a fresh drink of water before I go on with my story ”

CHAPTER IV

THE CAVE IN THE MOUNTAIN

As the "Prince of the Highway" finished the first part of his story and asked for a fresh drink of water before continuing, there was a wild, scampering foot-race between the two largest boys as they hastened away to the well, straining every muscle and nerve in the struggle to see who might have the pleasure of honoring the wanderer with a drink.

All the children that were seated upon the grass about the Vagabond, began working closer and closer toward him, forgetful now of the cool and almost unkind manner in which they had turned a deaf ear to his request for a drink when first he paused in the centre of the hot, dusty road. The

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little girls took off their bright colored sun-bonnets in order that they might not lose a single word that fell from the lips of the dust-covered story-teller.

“Mercy!” exclaimed one of the boys, as if just awakening from the scene that fancy had painted in his little brain. “Mercy!” again he exclaimed. “What a terrible climb! Isn’t it a wonder that the two children could hold on so long?”

As the words fell from the lips of the little speaker, the assembled children seemed to breathe a sigh of relief, for they well remembered that the two children were safe on the side of the mountain.

Back over the lawn came the two boys bearing the water; and after the thirsty Vagabond had refreshed himself, he blinked his little black eyes and smacked his dry lips with evident delight, as thus he continued his story:

“‘Aunt Twaddles’ and the children, by this time, were well rested; and rising from the ground

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she took them by the hands and went slowly up through the mountain woodland.

“The effort was not nearly so tiresome as the long struggle on the face of the cliff had been, and for some time they made rapid progress; for the mountain rose in a gentle slope and the way was closely shaded by tall trees, that some weeks before had unfolded their bright foliage to the blue sky of spring.

“If nothing greater was to be expected, the journey was a delight in itself; and it was fully an hour before they paused in a merry group on the very top of the mountain.

“As their feet reached the level soil of the mountain crown, ‘Aunt Twaddles’ dropped her big bag of herbs for a moment of rest, and turning to the children, she exclaimed:

“‘There, darlings, at last! Now gaze about you on the great underworld and see if this isn’t worth

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all the trouble and toil that we had on the face of the cliff ?’

“ Almost dumb with surprise, the children turned about to gaze upon the world that lay far beneath them.

“ For some time they stood looking upon familiar scenes, dwarfed now by the distance. The two children, both seeming to think of this fact, were wondering in their little minds how they would ever get down the side of the mountain, for they were really so high that it made them quite dizzy to look below.

“ Way down in the deep valley, like the houses of so many pygmies, nestled the village of Harpers Ferry, where the foot-bridge appeared like a narrow strand of dark tape, stretching across a snow-white stream.

“ Far to the westward, the long winding path of the Potomac River glistened in the bright sun-



“Almost dumb with surprise, the children turned about to gaze upon the world that lay far beneath them.”

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light like a spotless streamer of snow-white ribbon, sweeping with many a graceful curve far away into a narrow trail.

“Nearer by, dashing with loud, rumbling roar against the foot of the Blue Ridge mountains on the very top of which they were standing, the foaming, frolicking Shenandoah could be seen here and there, leaping between the tall rocky cliffs with merry, gamboling shout that arose like a song to their ears.

“Green wheat-fields, like so many squares of bright velvet carpet that good farmers had laid out in the sunlight to air, were plainly in view up the broad valley; and the blossoming peach-trees on the far distant hillsides, that stood bathing in the full glory of the day, looked to them like so many tiny rose bushes just bursting into full bloom.

“Nearer by on the mountain ridge, a stray mocking-bird sat in a tree top, testing his ruffled

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throat by bursting forth in a wild, beautiful chant, but changing the notes every moment or so to mock the sweet song of some one of his feathered acquaintances.

“Now sweet and low he was singing the song of the linnet and calling them all about him from their busy labor of nest building. Now he was causing the blue bird to flutter forth in jealous anger by softly coaxing away its mate. Then, uttering a loud shrill whistle, he sank into silence, waiting a reply to his eloquent call from some greatly deceived ‘Bob White’ that was eating its dinner far off in a bramble of mountain shrubs.

“Now sweet and low, he sang a song all his own; so sweet that the linnet and thrush grew silent; so tremulous and low that it called back his faithless mate from its wanderings. Then growing bold and defiant, with frantic effort, he carolled forth music wild and shrill, as if chal-

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lenging the rest of the song birds to a relentless vocal war.

“A gray squirrel barked high up in the top of the tall chestnut tree under which they were standing, and far down in a deep, cool hollow below, they heard a plumed pheasant drumming his battle tune unchallenged upon a log.

“‘Come, children,’ exclaimed ‘Aunt Twaddles,’ ‘let us go!’

“They followed the ridge of the mountain for some time; but the journey was made so delightful and charming by the wonderful scenes beneath them that the two children did not seem to notice just how far they had travelled, although they had gone a great distance and everything about and beneath them seemed new and changed.

“Suddenly they turned to the left from the mountain ridge and passed down into a dark ravine, the sides of which were so very high that ‘Aunt

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Twaddles' said the sun never shone anywhere within its dark bounds, not even during the noon hours of midsummer.

"It was a dark and gloomy place indeed, filled with great pitfalls of slimy, green liquid, from which arose an unpleasant odor; while there was barely enough light for them to see that the steep sides of the ravine were covered with a damp mould.

"With a feeling of relief they emerged from this horrible place to find themselves entering a beautiful and heavily wooded glen.

"Aunt Twaddles' informed them that the gloomy ravine through which they just passed was called 'The Valley of Dry Bones,' for the reason, as she said, that the bird or animal once entering it scarcely ever came out alive, and that what few did escape death were mere skeletons.

"And how is it that we are not skeletons, Aunt

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Twaddles, now that we have passed through the valley?' exclaimed Arthur, with an inquiring glance.

" 'Because we have used the power of reason, my dear, which no bird or animal except man possesses,' she replied. Then, pausing to glance back, she continued: 'Knowing the dangers of the valley, I used the power of reason and laid my course. If you do not use the power of reason, my boy, you will often find yourself in the Valley of Dry Bones as you journey along through life.'

" 'Arthur would have questioned 'Aunt Twaddles' further, but they were now in a beautiful glen; and as they journeyed along he turned about to behold the lovely creations of nature that lay on every hand.

" 'The glen was not very wide, and the leafy branches of the tall, overhanging trees were so mingled together that the bright sunlight could

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not break through, while the beautiful wild flowers seemed striving to outdo each other in spreading their perfume about on the balmy air. Yet search as they might, there was not a spray of pennyroyal anywhere to be seen.

“A second glance over the glen proved it to be a most picturesque spot indeed; for the rocks that arose here and there from the flower-covered soil were not dark and weather-stained like those along the Shenandoah River, and the wild ferns and perfumed flowers tempted the observing children to stay their steps.

“‘Now,’ exclaimed ‘Aunt Twaddles,’ as they walked slowly along, ‘this beautiful glen, my darlings, is called Temporary Delight, which means short pleasures; for, as you see, we are near its end.’

“Looking up, the children were surprised to behold in front of them a mountain of solid stone.

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“ They had not met with a greater surprise during their entire journey than this towering cliff of rock that now barred their way ; and little Maud, suddenly hushed, dropped her flowers upon the ground and turned with a troubled look to ‘ Aunt Twaddles ’ as she said in a trembling voice :

“ ‘ Aunt Twaddles, the flowers are beautiful, but, see, they fade as quickly as they are plucked, and are not worth carrying. Besides, I do not see any pennyroyal. How shall we ever get beyond this great mountain ? ’

“ ‘ Aunt Twaddles ’ was standing on the top of a rock, the summit of which she had reached with a mighty bound ; and as she noticed the troubled look on the faces of the children, she laughed until her fat sides fairly shook, when she said to little Maud in reply :

“ ‘ The pleasures of life, like these flowers, are never very lasting, my dear. Never mind, you

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shall have your pennyroyal. Just learn to wait and be patient, for all things require time.'

"She made an effort to whistle, but her fat cheeks refused to make other than a low hissing sound.

"It was enough. There was an answering warble from far off in the woodland, then a sudden flutter of swift crimson wings among the near-by branches. In another second a beautiful Red Bird came sailing down the dark glen and, greatly to the surprise of the two children, lighted upon one of 'Aunt Twaddles' ' shoulders where it began to sing a most beautiful song.

"In the excitement of the moment, Arthur dropped the handful of withered flowers he had gathered for his little sister, and with hands half raised, shouted for her to turn quickly that she might behold the wonderful bird; but the startling cry of the boy was hushed as he beheld the Red Bird

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drop from its slender claw a bright golden key into the outstretched hand of 'Aunt Twaddles', and then sail away into the woodland.

" 'Aunt Twaddles' stepped toward the cliff and, turning to the surprised children, she waved the golden key in the air, as she said in her usually kind way.

" 'Now, children, listen. I know the old one-legged miser who keeps the Inn at the Ferry and have known him ever since he was an ill-tempered boy who respected not the will of his parents. I knew your brave father, too, let me say, many years before he marched gallantly away to the war from which he never returned. Often have I given your sweet mother a bite of my candy, long, long before she went to live with the angels. And now, for the love of yourselves, as well as for the memory and respect that I bear your dear, dead parents, I am going to give you that moment

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of peace and joy that the cross old miser so begrudges you down at the Inn.'

"With that she faced the mountain and placed the golden key in a deep crevice of the rock, at the same time repeating some strange and mysterious words.

"There was a deep, rumbling roar within, that sounded like the angry roll of distant thunder and greatly frightened the children ; when, with a tearing crash, the tall mountain parted at the centre.

"Pieces of bursting rock went flying through the air in every direction.

"Great columns of smoke rose upward and spread over the entire sky like a mighty cloud.

"The severed cliff rolled away to the side and there before them stood the entrance to a deep, dark cave that looked gloomy and filled with danger.

"At first, little Arthur and Maud drew back in

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affright and stood ready to fly up the glen for their lives ; but ‘ Aunt Twaddles,’ turning toward them, exclaimed in calm, easy tones :

“ ‘ Fear not, my children ! Fear not, for I am your friend ! ’

“ Then without another word she entered the mouth of the dark cave and at the chiming sound of a deep-toned bell, the cavern became filled in a second with a million bright and glowing lights, the like of which no mortal eye had ever beheld.

“ The two little children, now overcome with amazement, stood for the moment speechless and motionless in the presence of the strange scene that lay before them.

“ The great flood of light that poured from the cavern illumined the scene with a strange beauty, that, falling upon the clear, crystal-like rocks of the glen, seemed to make them glow with sparkling radiance like so many diamonds ; and the

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wild flowers of the woodland and the foliage of the trees hung trembling beneath the magic glare that the flood of fire cast upon them from the mouth of the enchanted cave.

“Both Arthur and Maud seemed enchanted too. They could have remained upon the spot perfectly contented, for a long time, had not ‘Aunt Twaddles’ broken the spell by calling them. Taking each by the hand, she led them into the cavern.

“Instead of the rough, rude, unpolished walls of dark stone that the two children had expected to find, they were surprised to see the beautiful crystallized formations that hung everywhere from the roof of the cavern. The whole place seemed to be one living blaze of light. The floor was as smooth as a piece of glass and so polished that it might have answered the purpose of a mirror.

“They stood gazing about the great cave for

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some time, when 'Aunt Twaddles' hurried them on their journey, exclaiming:

" 'Come, children, for we have far to go!'

" They walked rapidly on through the cavern for some distance, not failing, however, to take time to explore its most interesting parts.

" It was not long before they came to a broad river that, with its swift current, dashed through the great cave with mighty roar. 'Aunt Twaddles,' realizing that in order to proceed upon their journey they had to cross this stream in some manner, paused with the two children on the shore. They stood at the edge of the water, gazing far out over the tide and wondering what they were going to do, when, at a wave of command from 'Aunt Twaddles,' a water sprite rose slowly from the tide and in another instant stood bowing and scraping before them.

" He was a most curious-looking creature indeed ;

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and, although bearing little or no resemblance to the people of the earth, he was not at all bad to look upon.

“ His face beamed constantly with a broad smile, that spread his wide mouth with its thin lips almost from ear to ear; while, in addition to a good pair of arms, and hands with long, bony but webbed fingers, he had, on either side of his shoulder blades, broad fins like a fish, which, no doubt, he used in his progress through the water.

“ His head ran up to a very sharp point on the top—not a bad feature at all for diving, as it was sharp like a boat. His eyes, instead of setting crosswise in his head, as the eyes of most everything do, set straight up and down with an eyebrow running along on either side of his nose, the sight of which caused little Arthur almost to laugh in his face.

“ As he thus stood smiling and bowing before

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them, 'Aunt Twaddles' turned to the two children and said:

" 'I left a boat here on this side of the river but this mischievous creature has taken it away. We had him sent to this underground river because one night he cut off the beautiful hair of a mermaid and made it into a wig for himself. I wish you could have seen him when he appeared the next day with his false golden locks and dark skin. He really looked as ridiculous as some of those women who have yellow hair and black eyebrows.

" With that she made a movement of the hand and the sprite leaped straight upward into the air, almost as high as the roof of the cavern; then, turning a somersault in mid air, he landed head first in the water with a splash and was gone.

" It was not long before a big boat came swiftly across the stream. No one was in it, no one was pushing it, and no one was pulling it, so far as any-

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one could see. It came rapidly on and landed with great care directly in front of 'Aunt Twaddles' and the children, and without visible aid, bore them swiftly across the stream and landed them safely on the other side of the river, where they resumed their journey.

"As they walked slowly along under the glaring light, the children beheld long rows of shelves covering one entire side of the cavern. When Arthur inquired of 'Aunt Twaddles' what they might be, they paused for a moment while she informed them that this great cavern was the Store House for the seeds of all the flowers and fruits that grew in 'Beauty Valley.'

"Although Arthur wanted to inquire further about 'Beauty Valley,' for he had never heard its name mentioned before, his inquisitive nature was silenced; for, scarcely had 'Aunt Twaddles' finished telling about the wonderful places to be

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found in the enchanted cave, when they came to its end and found themselves stopped by the presence of a great stone door.

“For a moment, ‘Aunt Twaddles’ stood before this door, waving her fat arms in a strange, frantic manner, as if she had entirely gone out of her mind. In a low tone she uttered many strange words, which the children did not understand; and you can imagine their surprise as they beheld the stone door move quickly but silently to one side, and a flood of golden sunlight sweep into the cave.

“They were now very anxious indeed to know what new wonder might lie before them.

“As the stone door rolled away, the enchanted cavern again became dark and the children wanted to hasten out into the sunshine at once; but the voice and hand of ‘Aunt Twaddles’ caused them to stay their steps, as in earnest tones she exclaimed:

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“‘Wait, darlings! We must wait until the Red Bird comes back with a message before we dare step upon this sacred soil.’

“And before she had finished speaking, a beautiful Red Bird flew into the mouth of the cavern and lighted upon ‘Aunt Twaddles’ shoulder. She whispered some strange words into its ear and it darted rapidly away.

“And now while ‘Aunt Twaddles’ and the children are waiting the return of the magical Red Bird in the mouth of the great cave, we will wait here for a moment of rest while the boys bring some fresh water from the well, for I know some of you are quite thirsty.”

And the Vagabond, wiping the perspiration from his dusty brow, sank into silence and began fanning himself with his tattered black hat.

CHAPTER V

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As the Vagabond ceased speaking, a murmur passed completely around the party, and it was easily seen that the children were delighted with the story so far as it had gone.

Three of the boys arose, and bidding their near-by companions hold their places in the charmed circle, dashed away to the well for water. The rest of the children closed in about the now smiling wanderer and sat silently gazing upon him, thinking, no doubt, how fortunate they were in having given him a drink of water when he first paused in the roadway.

By this time they were almost willing to give him the well itself if he desired it.

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The three boys hastened back with the water, and the Vagabond, having passed it around to the children, dampened his brow with the remainder, and wiping it dry on his coat sleeve, waited for the boys to be seated.

A robin came from far across the field and lighted in the top of the tree under which they were seated, as if it, too, wanted to hear a part of the story. Turning his eye for a second upon the red-breasted songster, the Vagabond continued his tale.

“ A little time soon passes away like the song of that robin above us ; and it was not long before the Red Bird returned with a noisy flutter of its crimson wings, while the clang of deep-toned bells sounded within the cavern. As the great stone door moved slowly into place, ‘ Aunt Twaddles ’ and the children stepped from the mouth of the cave with a merry bound into the sunlight.

“ Before them lay a broad, beautiful, green valley,

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that, at a first glance, seemed to be shut in by tall mountains on all sides; while in the centre of a blue-grass lawn rose a village of tiny play-houses, each as perfectly and as carefully built as the home of some boasted citizen of wealth and fame.

“Each house was ornamented with a vine-covered porch and green window shutters, while through the open windows and doorways floated a balmy, midsummer atmosphere, laden with mingled perfume of wild honeysuckle, orange blossoms and roses,—so charming that I, a poor vagabond, am at a loss for suitable words to describe it.

“The village itself was laid out in wide, well-paved streets with a great public square in the centre, where arose a most beautiful building of white marble, ornamented here and there with figures of doll babies carved from the solid stone.

“The streets stretched away from the public square in every direction for considerably more

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than a mile and so charmed and bewildered were the children by this unexpected sight that, for a long time, they stood looking at it, fairly trembling with delight.

“From the side of a cliff that formed part of a mountain near where they were standing, a great rock projected far over their heads like a rugged shelf, to which a winding staircase of pure onyx gave easy access. A golden throne stood far out on this rocky shelf from which all parts of the village, as well as of the valley, could be seen with a sweeping glance.

“Before the children had time to make any inquiry, ‘Aunt Twaddles’ took them by their hands and led them up this glistening stairway to the golden throne, where they stood looking about over the wonderful surroundings.

“‘Make yourselves at home,’ said ‘Aunt Twaddles,’ as she sank back with a sigh of relief into a

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golden chair ; but when little Maud turned to thank her politely, she found her little heart so full of gratitude and joy she was unable to speak a single word.

“ Down in the village of tiny play-houses, bright, happy-faced dolls were playing upon the clean streets and out on the lawn of the public square ; while hundreds of dolls were streaming in and out of the beautiful building around which lay the miniature village.

“ They were laughing and talking, chatting and romping, until the air fairly echoed with the sound of their merry voices. Many, separated from the rest in groups, were playing all sorts of games ; and so firmly were the bright eyes of the children riveted upon the gamboling, playful beauties that nothing seemed able to draw their attention away.

“ Over the village hung an unclouded arch of bright, blue sky, while scattered everywhere on the

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green lay toys and playthings of every known kind that might either amuse or instruct the doll babies.

“Some dolls were busily engaged in running toy steam engines. Others were spinning their tops on the streets of the village. Still others were sending up crimson and yellow and blue balloons and watching them pass out of sight or burst in mid-air.

“Off in a vacant place a number of boy dolls were flying their kites, and others were playing baseball and tennis; while marbles in millions lay scattered all over the ground. Little Arthur, eyeing them enviously, turned to his sister and said:

“‘Mercy! Wouldn’t I like to have some of those beautiful toys down in Harpers Ferry.’

“Maud’s only reply to her delighted brother was a long-drawn sigh, on the very breath of which she exclaimed:

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“ ‘Oh, Arthur! Look at the beautiful dolls!’

“ For a long time the children watched the dolls as they romped upon the clean streets and green playgrounds. Finally, little Maud looked up at ‘Aunt Twaddles’ and inquired with a serious air and softened voice :

“ ‘Aunt Twaddles, is this Heaven?’

“ A sudden smile spread over ‘Aunt Twaddles’ big fat face. Leaning forward toward the edge of the golden throne, she placed her head between the two children, and pointing to the village with a clumsy, awkward hand, she said :

“ ‘This beautiful spot, my dear children, is the Village of Hide and Seek. You might truthfully call it a heaven for the dolls, for they never have any trouble or sorrow here.’

“ Little Maud breathed a deep sigh as she turned again to her friend and exclaimed in breathless surprise :

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“‘The Village of Hide and Seek! What a beautiful place! And I never heard of it before!’

“She sank into silence when she saw a little doll bowing very politely, as it introduced one little doll to another whom they happened to meet on a side street of the village.

“The question asked by his little sister and so beautifully answered by ‘Aunt Twaddles,’ paved the way for Arthur to ask some questions himself. Turning to ‘Aunt Twaddles’ he said:

“‘Aunt Twaddles, what is that beautiful white building with the tower of gold standing in the very centre of the public square? See! The dolls are hurrying to it from every direction!’

“When the boy had finished speaking, ‘Aunt Twaddles’ took one sweeping glance over the village and replied:

“‘That fine building, my darlings, is the

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Temple of Music. When the clock in its tower strikes twelve all the dolls will come out of the Temple, and, gathering on the green about the band stand, they will all begin to sing.'

"Arthur and Maud glanced away toward the clock that stood just beneath the golden dome in the tower of the Temple of Music. It was five minutes to the hour; yet the dolls were forsaking their playthings all over the village and rapidly hastening to the Temple. In a moment more the streets of the village were deserted.

"There lay their thousands of fine toys with no one to molest them. There stood their play-houses with wide-open windows and doors and no one to touch the fine furniture within; while beyond lay the broad, green, but now idle playground.

"The hands of the clock in the tower closed slowly, one upon the other, as if in loving embrace.

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“One, two, three, came the sound of the chime in the belfry, and thus it continued until the last stroke of twelve, when, from the wide-open doors of the Temple of Music, the dolls filed out into the public square and formed themselves in circling rows around the band stand.

“In glittering raiment of silver and gold lace, the Doll-Baby Brass-Band of fully five hundred pieces appeared on the scene and took its place in the band stand.

“A marshall, or music master, climbed to his place on a pedestal.

“There was a loud tap of his gold baton and the instruments went up to the lips of the happy-faced players. Then came a firm wave of command; and one grand, wild burst of sweet melody fell upon the ears of the delighted children, so overcome by the sight and sound they had to lean upon the side

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of the golden throne, as all the dolls in the village
thus began to sing :

“ ‘ Oh come to the Village of Hide and Seek,
For Little Boy Blue, and Little Bo-Peep,
With Hi-Diddle-Diddle, the Cat and the Fiddle,
Are coming to visit us soon.
Old Mother Goose will be sweeping the sky,
And poor Simple Simon will bring us a pie ;
While Little Jack Horner will milk on the corner
The Cow that Jumped over the Moon.

Chorus.

“ ‘ We are glad that you came, so please tell us your name
And join us a while in our favorite game.
You should dwell in the Village of Hide and Seek,
For it's Saturday here every Day in the week,—
It is Saturday, Saturday all of the week.

“ ‘ Now Jack from his Bean Stalk will jump to the ground.
The Black Birds will leave the King's pie with a bound.
While Old Mother Hubbard will open her cupboard
And search it again for a bone.

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The Dish will come back with the Spoon that it stole,
And Dickery Dock bring the mouse from its hole,
While we will go hunting for Bye Baby Bunting,
And bring her poor Daddy back home.

(Chorus.)

“ ‘ Mary Contrary will pay us a call,
And fat Humpty Dumpty will tumble and fall,
While poor Jack and Jill, who fell down the hill,
Will gambol about on the green.
The Old Woman and children that lived in a Shoe,
With the Piper and Tom and the Pig, will come too—
And bring Mrs. Jack Sprat with a mouth full of fat,
And Jack with a mouth full of lean.’

(Chorus.)

“ ‘ The singing was over ; and, as the last notes died on the air, the children seemed to waken as if from a trance, for their eyes had been riveted upon the singing dolls in one long, unbroken stare.

“ ‘ Such singing ! ’ cried little Maud, as she turned toward her still dazed brother.

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“ ‘Such a band !’ he exclaimed, merrily clapping his hands as he glanced from his sister to ‘Aunt Twaddles ;’ while down in the Village of Hide and Seek the dolls were filing back into the Temple of Music.

“ ‘Look !’ exclaimed ‘Aunt Twaddles,’ as she pointed away toward the village. ‘The dolls are going back into the Temple to practise and the streets of the village will now be deserted for at least an hour.’

“The happy children turned about just in time to see the last of the great army of dolls as they entered the doors of the Temple. All now throughout the village lay quiet and still.

“Off in the far end of the valley flowed a golden stream. It was quite wide indeed and its current, as yellow as any gold that was ever made into a finger ring, rippled at a surprisingly rapid rate.

“The banks on this side were clear of bushes

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and nothing grew to hide any of the swift-flowing river from view. On the opposite side, and close to the edge of the tide, arose tall buildings surrounded by huge piles of well-seasoned lumber, from which came a buzzing sound as if this might be a factory of some kind.

“Farther down on the edge of the stream stood several long sheds filled with bolts of silk and ribbon, satins and laces in great piles without number; while standing well up in the sky and high over all, as if suspended from the arched heavens above, hung a tall, golden sign with shining letters that glistened in the dazzling sun light.

“For a long time the strange sign greatly puzzled the children, for the letters seemed to be put up backward and failed to spell anything in particular; while through the open spaces between them they could just see the outlines of a herd of reindeer feeding afar in a field of spotless snow.

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“ Arthur’s inquisitive nature could permit no such puzzle to remain long unsolved, and turning to ‘ Aunt Twaddles ’ he excitedly asked :

“ ‘ Aunt Twaddles, what are those tall buildings with the strange sign over them ? ’

“ ‘ Aunt Twaddles ’ looked up with a smile and almost shouted with a merry laugh, ‘ Strange sign ? ’ “ But as she glanced in the direction of the golden stream, she burst forth in an astonished, serious tone and said :

“ ‘ Mercy upon us ! The wind has turned the sign completely around. ’

“ She touched a small pearl button inlaid in the arm of her golden chair, and all at once a gentle breeze swept down the valley, rustling the leaves and tilting the tops of the trees that stood in its way. Slowly the great sign turned upon its centre with a loud, squeaking sound.

“ Again ‘ Aunt Twaddles ’ touched the pearl

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button. The breeze ceased blowing; the leaves became silent. Both Arthur and Maud nearly fainted; for now before their very eyes they read in large letters of pure, burnished gold.

“ ‘WORK SHOPS AND FACTORIES OF SANTA CLAUS. Established A. D. 1.’

“ No wonder that piles of seasoned lumber towered sky high! No wonder great sheds filled with silk lined the bank of the stream!

“ There, surely enough, were his reindeer feeding far off in the snow-fields; and as the ever good-natured Santa Claus himself appeared on the roof of his factory and waved them a hearty welcome, the children, awed by the sight of this great man, sank into the stout arms of ‘Aunt Twaddles’ in a spasm of silent joy.

“ ‘Well!’ exclaimed ‘Aunt Twaddles’ after a time. ‘I am so glad you saw Santa, for he seldom allows even the dolls to see him except about

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Christmas time ; and now if you will be patient for a moment, we shall see what this button will bring forth.'

" She touched a blue button inlaid among many in the arm of her golden chair.

" Instantly, far off in the mountain, the children heard singing. Not the sweet singing of childish voices that had come from the multitude of dolls in the village, but a wild, musical chant that seemed to set the very air in motion and to waken a thrill in their hearts such as they had never known before.

" Closer and closer it came until the merry voices could be heard quite plainly. Nearer and nearer, until the words fell upon their delighted ears, as if spoken by someone upon the very throne at their side.

" All the dolls came pouring out of the Temple of Music through every door of the building, and

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forming themselves into line behind a soldierly looking little leader, they separated into companies and regiments and commenced a marching drill, as thus the voices sang :

“ ‘ The Ice Cream is so delicious,
And the Cake so soft and fine.
Come on, Brownies, bring the dishes,
And Doll Babies fall in line ;
Tell the boy dolls and the ladies
To give every tot a spoon,
And put bibs upon the babies,
For we’re coming with it soon.

Down the hill, down the hill,
Not at all like Jack and Jill,
For the cream we never spill,
While our voices loud and shrill
Echo back from hill to hill.’

“ Louder and louder came the chant from the mountain ; when lo ! as they gazed in the direction

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of the music, they were surprised to behold dwarf after dwarf marching down the mountain-side, each singing with all his might.

“ At some distance behind them, scurrying helter skelter and pell mell, were a group of acrobatic brownies, turning somersaults and handsprings, flip flaps and cart wheels. Some were sliding down the steep on one ear, while others paused for a moment to stand straight up in the air on the tips of their noses. Some were walking along on their hands; but all moved with merry, joyous shout onward toward the village, juggling their dishes in the air as they came.

“ The voices of the singers were in perfect unison, from the little pot-bellied brownie in the rear, who sang bass, to the flat-faced pygmy in the centre, whose high tenor notes echoed and re-echoed among the surrounding mountains. Thus gaily they came onward, while ‘ Aunt Twaddles ’ and

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the children stood watching them from the throne.

“Down in the Village of Hide and Seek all now was silent. The Doll-General had scattered his forces and marched them away in a quiet, orderly manner to long tables methodically grouped on the lawn. All the dolls seemed to be listening to the sweet music.

“Louder and louder came the song from the band of musical midgets. As they drew nearer, Arthur and Maud noticed that each dwarf carried a large tray before him and that the trays were loaded with good things to eat, piled so high that a strong wide strap encircled the neck of each dwarf and helped support the tray at its sides.

“Down the line the army of tumbling pygmies came whirling along, each bearing a tower of snow-white china dishes; and, strange as it may seem, not a dish was broken in the rocky journey.

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“The dwarfs were not long in spreading their fine feast before the dolls. They had scarcely begun to pass around the cake when two sturdy-looking dwarfs staggered up the onyx steps of the throne, bearing two heavily laden trays.

“They were followed by four funny-faced little brownies who spread a table before the children, and, winking and blinking and smiling, went merrily about their work.

“When the table was all prepared, the dwarfs placed before each of the children a big turkey-dish piled two feet high with vanilla, strawberry and chocolate ice cream. The four brownies then stepped between them and sat down a wash tub filled with rich chocolate layer cake. Then, with a wild shout of hilarious joy, they slid head-first down the golden balustrade and landed upon the grass, turning somersault after somersault as they rolled along on the velvety lawn.

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“And such ice cream it was! You could fairly see the rich, yellow cream oozing out of it. Little Maud declared, as she looked at her brother with a delighted smile, that it surely must have been sweetened with honey.

“‘My!’ she exclaimed, as she tasted it again and again, ‘What glorious cream! I could die eating it, but we must save some to take home.’ And she tasted it again, with a loud smack of her pretty lips.

“‘Aunt Twaddles’ leaned far back in her golden chair and, seeming to have overheard little Maud, she straightened up as she exclaimed:

“Eat plenty of it, my darling! Eat plenty of it! For I have a whole valley full lying over between the mountains.”

“Instantly the children, startled at the very thought, looked up from their delightful repast.

“‘A whole valley full!’ exclaimed Arthur, but

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he could say no more, for he had to stop eating to think about it.

“He picked up a piece of cake and tasted it.

“‘Oh, Maud,’ he cried, ‘try some quick! Just try some! This is the grandest cake you ever ate.’ And as the children were feasting upon the cake, Arthur added in a half whisper, glancing down at the wash tub piled full:

“‘But we must not eat it all, Maud, we must save some to take home.’

“‘Eat plenty, my darlings, eat plenty!’ came from the lips of ‘Aunt Twaddles.’ ‘I have a tall mountain of it standing just across the valley before you.’

“The excited children again looked up from their feast and there, sure enough, just across the green valley and standing directly in front of them, towered a tall golden-colored mountain, that reached almost to the sky.

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“ And to think that it was all cake !

“ The children were so surprised they could make no reply. Between every mouthful they raised their sparkling eyes to look at Cake Mountain ; and, as there seemed to be no need of saving any of the cake or ice cream, they started in to do full justice to their repast, for they were truly hungry after the long journey from Harpers Ferry to the village of Hide and Seek.’

“ And now while little Arthur and Maud are enjoying themselves, and swallowing great spoonfuls of delicious ice cream, we will pause in the story for a moment while some of you swallow another drink of that nice cool water, if the boys will kindly bring it to us from the well.

CHAPTER VI

THE QUEEN OF THE DOLLS

THE hot sun was now standing directly over the tops of the trees, and, as the moving shade had left the Vagabond with a part of his circle of children out in its broiling rays, he was glad indeed to pause with his story while they all rose at his request and formed a new circle farther in under the sheltering branches. Four of the boys leaped from the ground and scampered away to bring the water as the Vagabond had requested.

When the new circle was formed, one of the little girls,—a sweet-faced darling of not more than five years, pushed herself away from the others, and with a feeling of pride, took a seat by

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the side of the Vagabond, where she sat looking into his face quite anxious for him to go on with his story.

The boys were not slow in returning from the well; and in order to assure themselves that the water would reach the parched lips of their companions fresh and cool, they had unbound the old oaken bucket from the well pole and were bearing it along, dripping full, between them. The water soon arrived, and by order of the Vagabond it was passed around, he not even forgetting to first wait upon the little lady who, so honored, sat proudly by his side. When they were all comfortably seated in the shade at last, it was thus he continued his interesting tale:

“After the two children had eaten all they possibly could, just as many of you drank all the water you possibly could, the dwarfs and brownies came hurrying up the stairs and were not long in

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removing the dishes and table. The brownies, in a most winning manner, insisted upon their eating more, for there was enough left to feed a dozen hungry children, but they were forced to reluctantly decline.

“ The sun-tanned brownie, who removed the dishes from in front of Maud, looked too funny for anything with his long-peaked cap set aslant on his little round head and roguishly pushed over to one side. On his face appeared a broad grin as he took the dishes under his arm, and gazing intently toward little Maud, said in a shy, half-whisper though sufficiently loud for her to hear: “ Pretty girl ! ”

“ Then without waiting a reply, he made one wild, hilarious plunge, dishes and all, down the balustrade. Nor did he stop when he struck the ground, but hurried away toward the mountain, halting only for a second when half way up its

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steep side to wave her an affectionate adieu with his funny round cap. Thus waving he passed from sight under the sheltering trees that grew along the mountain way, while the children turned to view other parts of the beautiful valley.

“ ‘What broad, golden stream is that, Aunt Twaddles?’ inquired little Arthur, as he pointed toward the Work Shops of Santa Claus.

“ ‘Aunt Twaddles’ glanced up as he spoke and looking in the direction of the golden stream, she replied.

“ ‘That, my darlings, is Taffy River.’

“ ‘Taffy River!’ exclaimed the children in one breath. Then Arthur, in an excited tone, continued: ‘You don’t mean to tell us, Aunt Twaddles, that taffy flows in a river like that!’

“ The children stood anxiously awaiting her reply.

“ ‘Yes, darlings! Oh, yes!’ she replied.

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‘Taffy River gets its start up at Honey Springs in the lower end of Ice Cream Valley and flows, as you see, down between Ginger Bread Hills and Cake Mountain, then on past the Work Shops of Santa Claus and empties into Lake Fudge, over beyond the Pop Corn Fields where you see the reindeer.’

“Arthur was so bewildered he did not know what to say; while little Maud stood with her mouth open in such a manner that she was quite amusing to look upon. Suddenly she exclaimed:

“Mercy, Aunt Twaddles! Is that white field pop corn? Why I thought it was snow!”

“‘No! no! my children!’ smilingly exclaimed the good lady. ‘That field is all pop corn. You see,’ she continued, ‘we never have either rain or snow here. Not a particle of water is ever permitted to fall in this enchanted valley, not even a drop of dew; for if it should, though it was only a

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tear, something dreadful would surely happen. This is not our will, but the will of Heaven; and if you watch, you will see for yourselves.'

" 'Aunt Twaddles' touched another button in the arm of her golden chair and gazed calmly over the valley.

" While they were waiting for something unusual to happen, little Maud roused from a spell of deep thought and inquired:

" 'Aunt Twaddles, does any of Taffy River ever empty into the Shenandoah?' And her eyes sparkled at the thought.

" 'Ah, no, darling,' replied the generous old woman with a knowing smile. 'When the children of the earth are good, Santa Claus takes most of it on his journey at Christmas time; but when they are naughty it overflows Lake Fudge and is wasted among the surrounding hills.'

" 'Aunt Twaddles' seemed somewhat impatient

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and again pressing the button with a firm hand, the children were greatly surprised to behold a heavy, dark cloud rising in the west. Leaping upward it came flying angrily over the summit of Ginger Bread Hills; then dashing furiously against the tall sides of Cake Mountain it rolled upward with the sound of deep, muttering thunder and spread over the entire sky.

“The wind came howling bitterly down the beautiful valley with a sudden dash and roar, and again turned the sign above the factory of Santa Claus out of reasonable position.

“Strong trees bent low before the breath of the on-coming storm, while the entire end of Beauty Valley grew suddenly dark. All the dolls of the village hastened into their play houses as fast as their little legs could carry them. Santa Claus came out of his factory and, arching his eyebrows with the palms of his wide-open hands, cast a

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sweeping glance over the threatening sky and then disappeared within.

“The doors throughout this great factory were suddenly closed. Windows came down with a bang. Louder and louder the shrill wind howled with a wintry wail and in a few moments a blinding snowstorm of pop corn buried the distant field in a spotless coverlet of white.

“‘Aunt Twaddles’ touched another button in the arm of her chair. Suddenly the clouds melted away into a veil of thin mist and again the sun poured down its wealth of golden glory.

“Up went the windows in the factory of Santa Claus. The dolls rushed out of their play houses and danced once more upon the green, while a mighty host of brownies rushed from the factories into the field and began to gather basket after basket of pop corn to be made into pop-corn balls on the banks of Taffy River.

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“ ‘Aunt Twaddles’ sat back in her chair, smiling silently, for she had watched the expressions upon the faces of the children during the wonderful storm.

“ The scene was indeed most marvelous and it was a long time before either of the children ventured to say a word, for the wonderful workings of nature, all under control of the little, shining buttons, mystified them beyond utterance.

“ Suddenly they beheld a little brownie hurrying from the factory toward the throne. ‘Aunt Twaddles’ arose when she saw him coming.

“ ‘Here comes a messenger,’ she said, ‘and something must be wrong.’

“ In another second he bounded up the onyx steps and soon afterward stood tremblingly before them.

“ ‘What is it, Spit?’ inquired ‘Aunt Twaddles’ as she gazed down upon him.

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“ ‘Spit,’ for that was the name of the brownie, looked up into her face as he stood awed by her presence.

“ ‘ ‘Twaddles!’ he exclaimed, ‘during the storm the lightning struck a wooden doll in the village and hurt it mighty badly.’

“ As this sad bit of news fell on the ears of ‘Aunt Twaddles,’ she dismissed the brownie with a wave of her hand and sank back in her chair, and the children could see that she was much distressed.

“ ‘Come! come!’ she said to herself at last, ‘we must not grieve so much over accidents, for they are often the will of Heaven.’

“ She arose and greeted the children with a glad smile.

“ ‘Aunt Twaddles,’ inquired Arthur, ‘does Santa Claus always live here?’

“ Instantly, ‘Aunt Twaddles’ stepped back from the children and paused. She stood near the

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steps of the golden throne, her hand resting upon the white polished onyx post that ornamented the end of the beautiful balustrade, and turning to them, she said :

“ ‘ Yes, children, Santa Claus always lives here and I am his sister.’

“ As she spoke the last word, a magical change came over her entire features.

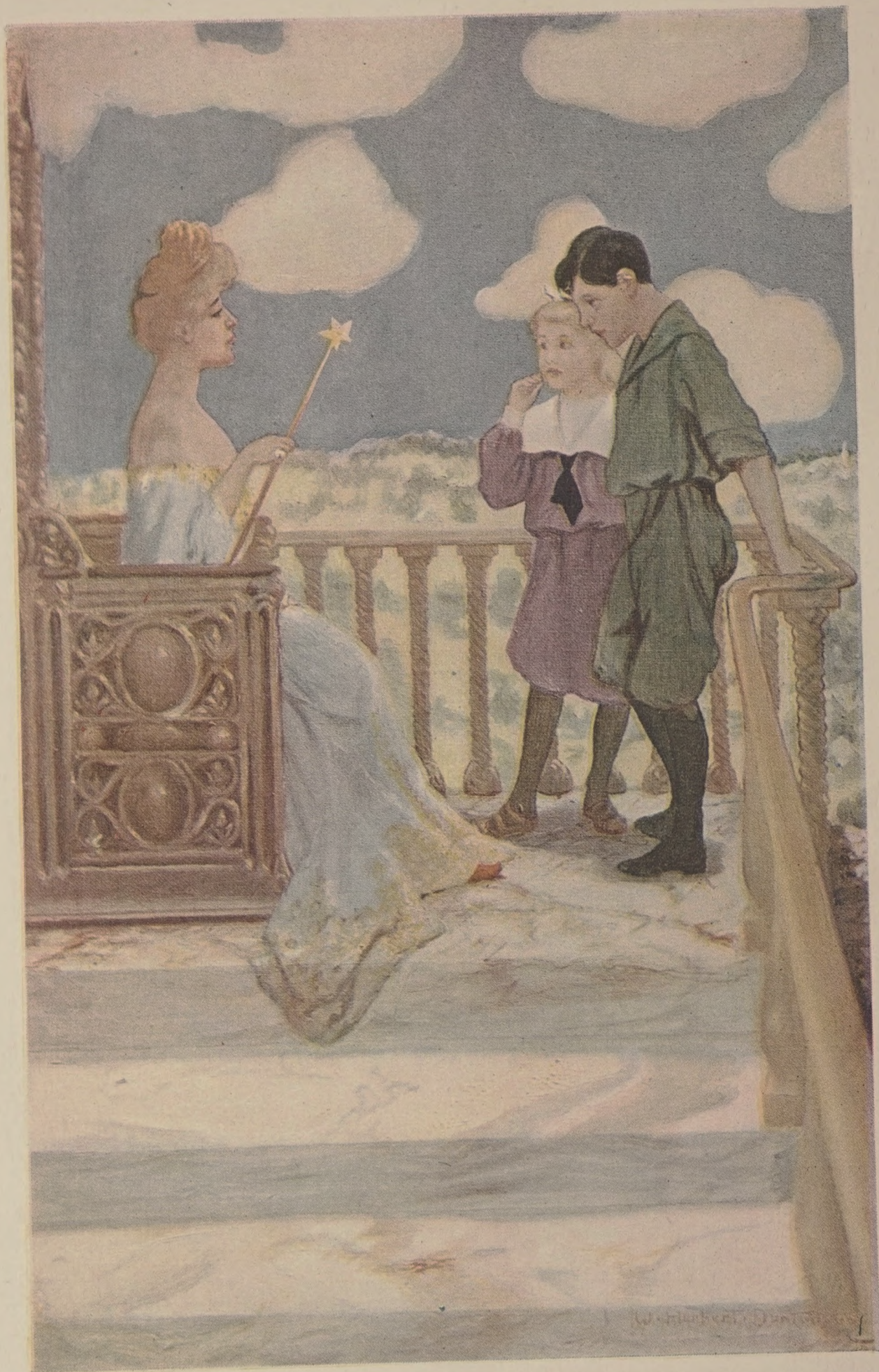
“ Instead of the fat, flabby, emotionless countenance the children had long known and loved, each careworn line withered instantly away, and in place came the bloom and smile of eternal youth and beauty; while the ungainly and ponderous weight that had so encumbered her journeys, disappeared all in a moment, until she now looked more like a beautiful fairy than the dear, good ‘ Aunt Twaddles ’ of old.

“ All the odd, ill-fitting garments, with the long, heavy skirt to which they had so firmly clung for

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their lives while climbing the face of the cliff, were changed before their very eyes into raiments of rich lace and gold; and she stood before them in her true character, no longer 'Aunt Twaddles,' the herb woman, but the fairy sister of Santa Claus, more lovely by far than any doll they had ever beheld.

“‘You see me now, darlings, as no mortal eye has ever beheld me. Amid the common walks of life, when gathering wintergreen, spices, and herbs on the mountain, with which to flavor the candy for Santa Claus, I am awkward and ugly, fat, and ungainly, and I care not; for the rarest of womanly beauty on earth lies not in the looks, but the heart. But here, in this haven of blissful repose, you now behold me as I truly am;—not Aunt Twaddles, the herb woman, but *Twaddles, the Queen of the Dolls*, and the ruler who reigns over the Village of Hide and Seek.’



"All the odd, ill-fitting garments were changed into raiments of gold."

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“Awed beyond measure and wrapt in admiring silence, the poor children stood trembling in the presence of the queen. Nor could they reconcile themselves to the sudden change, for ‘Aunt Twaddles,’ the herb woman, had always been so good and kind to them.

“Little Maud suddenly sank to her knees on the throne, and cried aloud in a pitiful voice:

“‘Oh, dear queen, how beautiful you are! But please be your dear self again, for I love the Aunt Twaddles who has always been so good to me.’

“Before she could finish her heart-rending plea, the beautiful Doll Queen folded her to her bosom and covered the face of the child with sweet, motherly caresses.

“‘Come! come!’ she said softly, at last. ‘We will make a tour of Beauty Valley, or, as the dolls of the village all love to call it, ‘The Land of

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Santa Claus.' And she unclasped Maud from her arms.

"The Queen touched a bell on a silver stand and at the faint sound a beautiful white-winged dove, with a pale blue ribbon about its snowy neck, came flying from a near-by olive tree and lit upon the edge of the throne before them.

"The children, much interested in the unusual sight, drew back toward the opposite side of the throne as if fearing they might frighten the bird away; but the Queen, smiling so sweetly that they felt like falling to their knees and worshipping her, turned to them as she exclaimed:

"'Have no fear, my darlings, for you cannot frighten it away. This bird is my private messenger that always finds Kimbo when I want him.'

"The Queen waved her hands with a graceful, easy motion, and the dove rose in the air on its snowy wings. Three times it circled above the

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throne, and then took its course toward the buildings of Santa Claus and passed out of sight. The Queen stepped lightly beside them and said :

“ ‘ Let us wait now, my darlings, for the arrival of Kimbo.’

“ And now while we leave the beautiful Queen standing with the children upon the golden throne and waiting for Kimbo, whoever he is, I will wait here by the side of this little queen, seated upon God’s Throne, the green grass, until some of the boys bring us more water ; for the day is sultry and warm and Miss Lady, so sweet at my side, must be kept like a fresh cut flower, shaded and cool.”

The Vagabond ceased with that part of his story.

CHAPTER VII

“KIMBO, THE GIANT”

“THE Queen of the Dolls!” cried all the children with delight.

“My, how I should like to meet her!” exclaimed one flaxen-haired little maiden, who formed a part of the circle.

The little girl beside the Vagabond declared she would have her mamma write to the Queen that night and ask Santa Claus to take the letter to her the next time he came around.

There was a loud outburst of merry laughter that was joined in by His Highness the Vagabond himself.

The mirth soon subsided, and before they had hardly time to engage in much general talk about

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the "Queen of the Dolls," five of the boys came hurrying from the well, bearing the old oaken bucket, dripping and cool. When the general thirst was quenched, the Vagabond cast a smile upon the upturned face of his sweet little friend, who so honored his side by her presence, as he thus went on with his tale.

"The white-winged dove had scarcely passed out of sight before the two children beheld a strange object moving up and down along the distant horizon; and so rapid was its approach that it was not long before they could distinguish the outlines of a gigantic personage.

"He seemed to be leaping over great fields, fully a mile at a stride, in his frantic effort to get to the throne. Turning to watch the approaching figure, the Queen cried aloud:

"'Oh, children, look quickly! Kimbo the Giant is coming with all his might!'



"He seemed to be leaping over great fields fully a mile at a stride."

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“And before the amazed children could say a word, the wondrous Kimbo cleared the factories of Santa Claus and Taffy River with a mighty bound, and in another instant stood before them.

“The giant was so tall that his ponderous chin was level with the floor of the golden throne; and you can well imagine their surprise, not a little of which was tinged with fear, when they saw his massive features.

“The children sank back in affright; but when the Queen assured them that the Giant was as kind as any doll down in the village, they ventured to turn with a shudder and look into his partly opened mouth. It appeared to them like a hole in the mountain near Harpers Ferry where the people once dug out coal.

“As he uttered a few words of respect to the Queen, accompanied with a low bow, the sound which came from his partly opened lips was like

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the deep, growling rumble of distant thunder and shook the very throne on which they were standing.

“His eyes were larger than saucers; and the great veins in his glaring eye-balls seemed like blood-red cords swollen and ready to burst. His ears, each ornamented with an earring as big as a wagon-tire, were as long as Maud’s little arm; and never a pumpkin grew longer or larger than Kimbo’s great nose.

“His neck was as thick as the trunk of the largest tree that grew down by the Shenandoah River, and just about as wrinkled and rough as its bark; while his broad shoulders were far wider than the entire throne of the Queen.

“His eyebrows resembled great patches of grass more than eyebrows, and his massive jaws, supporting a wrinkled chin, looked as if they might take a bite out of the very rock in the side of the mountain and not mind it in the least.

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“On the top of his head he wore a peculiar kind of rig intended no doubt for a hat, which was bound firmly in place by strands of his coarse black hair, as thick and perhaps as strong as a hawser. On closer inspection, however, this hat proved to be a kind of settee, for its entire side was an upholstered seat with strong arms and deep cushions.

“The Queen stepped toward the edge of the throne and invited the children for a ride on the Giant’s head.

“As they were all ready to get aboard, the Giant lowered his head until the settee was level with the floor of the throne and they were not tardy in getting comfortably seated. In another moment they were off on the journey.

“They started away at such a rapid pace that the children could hardly breathe; so the Queen cautioned the Giant to go more slowly, and he slackened his pace to the speed of a railroad train.

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The Queen informed them that he was then only walking, and that they need not be alarmed in the least as the Giant was sure-footed and would not stumble or fall.

“Onward they went like the wind, past the foot of Cake Mountain with its towering sides and dome of rich, brown crusted cake; on up through the Ice Cream Valley, where, with a mighty roar, the Honey Springs gushed from the ground. Thence over the Ginger Bread Hills and past field after field filled with pie plants, in which an army of brownies were gathering hot pies and sprinkling them with sugar.

“They passed through great groves of cocoanut trees from the tops of which shouting bands of wild monkeys threw cocoanut shells after them; thence through vineyards of ripening grapes and orchards of oranges and lemons, and arrived at last at the border of a most beautiful lake that,

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with its wild, wonderful surroundings, presented the grandest scene they had ever beheld.

The great Kimbo backed cautiously up to a towering rock, one side of which presented a straight cliff toward the lake; and when they had stepped from their high perch on the Giant's head to the smooth level top of the great rock, the Queen bade them pause for a moment to look about over the beautiful scene that now lay beneath and before them.

"Stretching away in the distance, almost as far as the eye could see, lay a marvellous lake that, in its fitful, frolicsome mood, resembled some rolling sea of crimson and gold and piled its great billows, glistening in the sunlight, with a resounding crash upon the pebbly shore.

"Far off to the right, and many thousands of feet higher than the rock on which they were standing, a stream came tumbling down from the

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crown of a tall mountain, and churning its waters into endless foam, fell into a deep and distant valley.

“ Pointing away with her pretty hand, the Queen said to the children :

“ ‘ Behold, darlings, the famous Butter-milk Falls of which you have heard so much ! The stream, as you see, does not enter into this lake, but falls from the top of Cheese Mountain and then wanders away through a sandy valley where it sinks into the ground.’

“ For a moment the children gazed upon it ; then Arthur exclaimed with some satisfaction :

“ I’m glad it doesn’t empty here for I never did like butter-milk.’

“ The Queen and the children laughed heartily at the very thought.

“ As they stood laughing upon the rock, they beheld at no great distance a wild, noisy cataract,

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where a beautiful, wide, golden stream leaped from a high rock, and whirling its never-ceasing torrent into endless eddies of a thousand different dyes, plunged into the lake that lay before them.

“‘Look, Maud!’ exclaimed Arthur. ‘Look! Look! The beautiful falls!’

“The children asked of the Queen its name and she replied:

“‘That, my darlings, is the end of Taffy River and those are the Stick Candy Falls. Here Taffy River pours its delicious stream over the rocks into Lake Fudge that you see lying before you. Now,’ she continued, ‘we will walk over and inspect Stick Candy Falls, after which we will return to this rock, for I consider this the finest viewpoint anywhere along the shore of the lake.’

“The Queen did not have to assist the children in their descent from the rock. With a merry bound they ran down the path ahead of her, de-

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lighted with the prospect of visiting the Falls which appeared so beautiful.

“ Around them on all sides, grew sweet-scented flowers that, at any other time, might have caused the children to stay their steps, for they were fond of wild flowers indeed; but on this particular occasion all the blossoms of the woodland would not have tempted them, for the sound of the roaring cataract grew louder and louder as they drew near.

“ The path descended into a little glen, the rocky sides of which hid the cataract from view; and the children stopped to look back upon the spot from which they had just come. There towered the tall rock with its one steep side facing the lake. The great Giant, Kimbo, sat on the ground at its base leaning against the cliff, his head drooped heavily forward almost between his drawn up knees. He was fast asleep.



"The children stopped to look back upon the spot from which they had just come."

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“ As they drew near to where the angry river made its desperate leap, the children were frightened, for the wind caused by the cataract came roaring about their ears, bearing mist and spray that for a time almost blinded them. They passed around this danger point and came to a more sheltered spot, where they paused to view the falls.

“ As they stood there they noticed that a path led far in behind the falling stream, and that the ledge over which this wonder of nature poured its wealth of golden beauty was a peculiar rock crystal, quite similar to that which ornamented the beautiful glen through which they had passed before entering the Enchanted Cave.

“ Arthur's inquisitive nature was awake and ready. He proceeded to test the tall ledge with the blade of his pen knife, when, as he placed a shattered bit of the rock to his lips, he shouted aloud to his sister :

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“ ‘ Oh, Maudie, this ledge of rock is Rock Candy!’ Then placing the remaining piece in his mouth, he rushed into the arms of the Queen to tell her of his surprising discovery.

“ Long formations of varying sizes and color were hanging everywhere; and the children understood at a glance that this was the place where Santa Claus gets all the stick candy with which he is so generous at Christmas time. The sticks hung wherever a crevice or crack appeared in the ledge, and no sooner was one broken off than another began to form in its place at once.

“ As they stepped forward to get a better view behind the falling torrent, they could see dozens of busy brownies breaking off the sticks and carefully packing them in long paper boxes, which others were carrying to the store house that stood on the towering brink above.

“ The Queen led them beyond the group of

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busy workers, when, looking up at the ledge over which the cataract hung like a graceful veil, they saw the following lines carved deep in the rock far above their heads. They paused and with some difficulty, read these lines.

“ ‘ Sweet Taffy River, with its eddies wild,
Comes dancing onward like a playful child,
Till from this towering ledge, with face aglow,
It bounds, delighted, to Lake Fudge below.’

“ They returned then to the high rock, and the children were surprised to see a great army of dolls moving rapidly toward the lake. The dolls were romping and chatting as they hurried along, but all seemed to have the same purpose in view for they were headed toward a certain point on the shore.

“ Both Arthur and Maud were nearly crazy to join them, but the Queen wanted to go up on the

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high rock again, and, as the will of the Queen was the law of the land, up the high rock they went.

They paused for a moment to look down on the great Kimbo, and laughed merrily when they saw he was still fast asleep.

“ ‘Don’t disturb him,’ said the Queen in a low tone, as she assisted the children up the path to the top of the rock.

“ Shout after shout arose from the crowd of dolls gathered upon the shore; and as their merry voices shook the air and resounded far over the lake, Maud inquired of the Queen the cause of their presence and the unusual tumult they were raising.

“ The Queen was standing still, looking far over the lake. It was some moments before she replied, for the commotion seemed somewhat unusual. Glancing toward Maud, she said, sweetly :

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“ ‘These, darlings, are all the dolls from the Village of Hide and Seek. They have come down to the shore and are anxiously waiting to be taken over in their ferry-boat to the Island of Dreams that lies in the centre of this beautiful lake.’

“ Pointing toward the location of the strange island, she continued :

“ ‘Wait a few moments and you will see!’ she said, casting another hasty glance far over the tide.

“ The children peered in the direction toward which the Queen pointed, and beheld far in the distance the dim outlines of an island low down on the very edge of the horizon. As they stood there they felt a drowsy sensation creep over them and, like the great Kimbo, they too would have fallen asleep had it not been for the sudden appearance of a strange-looking boat that was coming rapidly across the foam toward the shore.

“ As it drew into plain view the tumult of the

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dolls on the strand ceased. The children noticed, to their great amazement, that twelve dolphins were swimming in tandem through the tide and drawing the barque after them; while astride the back of each dolphin sat a beautiful mermaid to guide their course through the foam. With much skill as well as grace, they swang their magnificent craft to a carefully selected landing on the shore of the lake, while all the dolls scampered clamorously aboard, and the boat was soon away on its journey.

“Little Maud danced up and down on the big rock in a perfect spasm of delight, at the same time exclaiming as loud as she could:

“ ‘Oh, Queen, can’t we go, too? Can’t we go, too?’ ”

“Little Arthur looked up at the Queen disappointed when he saw that the barque was leaving the shore without taking them along.

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“ ‘Well, darlings,’ said the Queen, ‘if you wish, you too may go to the Island of Dreams.’

“ She looked down upon them with a sweet, winning smile.

“ Nothing in the world could have pleased them so well, for they hoped to meet all the dolls from the village over there. The Queen blew a little gold whistle that hung from a chain about her neck, and the massive head of the great Kimbo instantly appeared above the level of the rock, and he stood rubbing his sleepy eyes with the back of his hand, that seemed larger than the prize ham of a county fair.

“ ‘Kimbo, my boy,’ said the Queen, ‘tell the mermaids to send a boat for us.’

“ Then she turned to watch the doll boat that was fast disappearing in the distance.

“ A broad smile swept over the Giant’s good-natured face. He stamped his great foot on the

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ground, and woe to the rocks that were beneath it. The drowsiness left his leg, that, like himself, had fallen asleep, and as his foot came down with a mighty bang the earth all around the big rock trembled as if from an earthquake.

“Glancing into the faces of the children, he winked his big, sleepy eye with a sound like the clapping of hands that caused both of the children to laugh in his face. Then he turned slowly about and repeated the Queen’s request in thunderous tones.

“There was an instant pause of the dolphins in the distance; then a bright gleam of sunlight flashed from their tails as they lifted them from the lake in sportive glee. The shrill voice of an answering mermaid came from far over the waves; then they continued their journey and were soon lost to sight.

“The Queen turned to the children with a

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bright smile upon her pretty face and, giving each of them a sweet kiss, she said softly :

“ ‘ It won’t take them long, dear ones. It won’t take them long. We shall have to wait but a few moments.’

“ So now, while the beautiful Queen with the children are waiting on top of the rock for a boat to come for them, we will wait here under this tree for a fresh drink of water, that the dear ones gathered about me may keep comfortable and cool.”

The Vagabond cast a smile over the excited and anxious faces in the circle, as he brushed the sweat from his brow and ceased speaking.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ISLAND OF DREAMS

"I WONDER if my papa knows Kimbo, the Giant?" exclaimed the little one who was seated at the Vagabond's side. "He knows everybody. He knows Santa Claus, and Rip Van Winkle; and I heard him say that he once ate dinner with Jack the Giant Killer."

She paused and with a sweet smile looked up into the Vagabond's face.

"Your father must be quite a traveller himself!" he exclaimed in reply; to which the little girl quickly responded:

"He is."

Then she pushed herself over and without in-

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vation climbed on to the Vagabond's knee, which he carefully brushed with his old hat to receive her.

The merry group gathered closer and closer, and the circle gradually became smaller and smaller until now it was an all around squeeze ; when one of the little girls somewhat relieved the crowded condition by pushing herself out from the rest and taking the place at the Vagabond's side that had just been vacated by the little maiden for the preferable seat on his knee. Half a dozen of the boys arose, took up the old oaken bucket and hurried away to the well.

All the children were in great haste for the story to continue, and it did not take long for the boys to return with the water. The sun was shining down red hot, although it was quite comfortable under the tree ; and after the water had been passed around the circle and the faithful water

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carriers were seated in their respective places, the Vagabond went on with his story.

“In much less time than it has taken to refresh ourselves here under the tree, the two children beheld a beautiful barque bearing rapidly down upon them from far across the foam; and, as it approached, they noticed it was drawn by a pair of blue dolphins, guided by two mermaids who far exceeded in beauty any that accompanied the craft of the dolls.

“The Queen summoned Kimbo, and by the time he had lifted them down from the top of the tall rock, and they had dismounted from his hand upon the shore, the boat was ready to receive them.

“The Queen assisted the children on board, and they proceeded to examine the boat. Arthur said he had never beheld a real mermaid before, while little Maud declared that the closest she had ever been to one was in a picture-book. They

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kept their eyes turning from one mermaid to the other as the Queen said, by way of explanation :

“ ‘ You will notice that one of the mermaids has beautiful, long, golden hair that you might liken to sunlight, while that of the other is as black and glossy as the wing of a raven. Now, you see, it is no trouble to tell them apart, although it is a matter of mere taste as to which is the more beautiful. This one,’ she continued, ‘ we call Day, and that one Night.’

“ Day and Night gathered up their long golden reins as if ready to start, and the dolphins rolled impatiently in the tide.

“ A word of command came from the lips of each mermaid, then a wild, spasmodic splash of the dolphins’ tails, followed by a quick, forward motion of the boat, and they were away on their journey.

“ They sped rapidly along, and the children could not help marvelling, as they sank into the

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soft-cushioned seats of the boat. Seeming to notice their appreciation of its beauty, the Queen said :

“ ‘ This barque, my darlings, though not nearly so large as the one on which the dolls from the village embarked, is much more swift, and is never used by anyone except myself and Santa Claus.’

“ While she was speaking, the Island of Dreams came into full view. The ride was simply delightful. The dolphins lunged forward at such a rapid pace that a cool, soft breeze sprang up and fanned them. As they journeyed rapidly toward the island, they glanced up occasionally to admire its charming outlines.

“ The entire shore of the island seemed lined with tall, weeping willow trees, the long arms of which, with longer tendrils, hung everywhere far down to the ground, as if they, too, had partaken of the drowsy influence of the place and were half

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asleep. Not a breath of air stirred across the broad island to disturb their slumbering repose.

“As they drew near the shore, the children noticed that the surface of the lake was covered with broad leaves of water-lilies, that grew upward from deep down in the tide and held their yellow and white blossoms aloft to be admired. These water-lilies were so plentiful, that the dolphins had some difficulty in working the boat through them to the shore.

“Arthur and his sister sat very still. They were watching the graceful motions of the two laboring dolphins, when suddenly the very Heavens seemed to open far above them, and a bright light overspread the entire surface of the lake. Instantly the dolphins ceased from their labor. The sound of rushing wings seemed to come from high in the air; and, looking upward,



*"Looking upward they were amazed to behold the open sky filled
with sweet-voiced angels."*

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they were amazed to behold the open sky filled with sweet-voiced angels, who, as they came down from Heaven on fluttering pinions, sang to the delighted children the following song of welcome.

THE ISLAND OF DREAMS.

“ ‘In the midst of a lake that is crimson and gold,
Lies the magical Island of Dreams,
Where the flowers of fancy forever unfold,
And the sunlight of happiness gleams.
And no poor little girl, or no poor little boy
Need dread least some sorrow befall,
For the angels are near, when you’re visiting here
And God fashioned this island for all.
The Island of Dreams, the Island of Dreams,
God fashioned this island for all.

“ ‘On the isle in the lake that is crimson and gold,
You forget every sorrow and care,
And wander about amid beauties untold,
As free as a breath of the air ;

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And no lord of estate puts a lock on the gate,
To deny you its fanciful scenes,
For the angels of God guard the ever-green sod
Of the beautiful Island of Dreams.
The Island of Dreams, the Island of Dreams,
Guard the ever-green Island of Dreams.

“ ‘ When you visit the lake that is crimson and gold,
Bring poverty’s tatters along.
Little care if your garments are ragged and old,
For your soul shall be clothed in a song.
Though a hovel alone, you may claim as a home,
Where the sunshine of life never gleams,
You may bask in its smile, as you journey awhile
In the beautiful Island of Dreams.
The Island of Dreams, the Island of Dreams,
As you stroll through the Island of Dreams.’

“ As the beautiful song of welcome ceased, the
angels disappeared in the sky, and the boat swang
gracefully toward the shore.

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“The Queen assisted the children to the beach, and they started up a dark, cool and shady path toward the centre of the island.

“As they journeyed slowly along, Arthur noticed that the air was heavily laden with the dreamy perfume of flowers; and he suggested to the Queen that perhaps this was what made everything so drowsy about the place, for he declared that the odor made him sleepy.

“There were only a few of these flowers the children had ever seen before.

“Arthur recognized the tall, blooming magnolia trees from the description of them he had once read in a book; while the tuberose, the calla lily and the lilies of the valley, both the children knew well for they had often seen them in the gardens at home. All the rest were strangers to them, and for a long time they lingered to admire their wondrous beauty.

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“It was not long before they chanced to look up, and seeing a group of dilapidated, half-fallen houses in the hazy distance, moss-covered and almost hidden from view by the long branches of low-bending trees, the children turned to the Queen and asked the name of the curious-looking place.

“She informed them that the village was the home of the Sand Man, and that the name of it was ‘Drowsy Town,’ so named because everything about the place was half asleep.

“Often indeed had the children heard of the Sand Man, but they never expected to visit his home; so they hastened their steps and soon entered the curious village.

“The place contained but few houses, all of which were badly neglected and sadly out of repair; for who could stop to fix up houses in such a sleepy place? Beside, what do people care about

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the outside of a house when they are sleeping within all the time?

“The fences were mostly fallen, save here and there where a moss-covered stretch of old-fashioned wooden pickets leaned half-heartedly against their warped railings, while now and then a gate hung over on one hinge as if, like everything else, it was anxious to lie down in the dust and sleep.

“Long gray moss trailed from the eaves of the old buildings right down to the very ground and spread over the window casements like gray-green curtains to keep out the light, which it most certainly did.

“As the children passed the home of the Sand Man, by far the most neglected in the village, and to which the Queen pointed with evident pride, they lingered on the corner for a moment to look about the place.

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"A cat came slowly out onto the old porch, yawned, stretched and went in. A dog half arose, as the sound of their noisy feet on the worn out pavement disturbed his slumber, and raising his ears, glanced drowsily about, growled and then sank down to sleep under a green vine that sheltered one end of the porch.

"They moved slowly on, then stopped on the opposite corner and looked far down the silent and deserted street, where they saw a queer-looking individual, staggering and stumbling toward them.

"Now he would lunge forward head first into the trunk of an old tree; then, rousing himself, he would stagger onward only to fall over the curb stone, or run pell mell into a post. He finally tripped over a broken slab in the neglected walk and fell flat upon his face, from which position he seemed to arise with much difficulty.

"'Who is that staggering person' exclaimed

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Arthur, 'reeling toward us like some drunken man?'

"The Queen looked down the street as the boy spoke, and turning to the children with a smile upon her face, she excitedly exclaimed:

" 'Why, children, here comes Mr. Sleepy-Head to greet us! The Sand Man has sent him, for you know the Sand Man cannot leave his labors just now.'

"They stood waiting for him to draw near and could not help but laugh outright, as he again bumped squarely into a big tree.

" 'Who is Mr. Sleepy Head?' inquired Arthur.

" 'I never heard of him!' exclaimed little Maud.

" 'Oh yes, you have,' said the Queen, 'for many a book has been printed about him and his wonderful achievements. Some years ago,' she continued, 'he was quite a popular personage among the children of the world, but many of them seem to

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have forgotten him of late. His most popular mention perhaps was in a jingle that began something like this :

“ ‘To bed, to bed,’ said Sleepy Head,

‘ Let’s wait a while,’ said Slow.

“ Little Maud declared she had often heard her grandfather speak of him.

“ ‘Yes,’ said the Queen, ‘ he is always half asleep. It is his duty to sing to the children while the Sand Man sprinkles his sand in their eyes. He is a most beautiful singer, but the poor, industrious Sand Man has a very hard task in keeping him awake.’

“ As the Queen finished her explanation, Mr. Sleepy Head fell headlong into the gutter. He arose, brushed the dust from his garments, and with another sleepy, lazy lunge, stood bowing and smiling before them.

“ He was a curious-looking little man, with dull,

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dreamy eyes, and carried before him a small harp, securely bound to his person by a broad strap that encircled his neck. The harp was a woeful sight and was covered with dents and scars and cracks where he had fallen with it against various objects during his sleepy journeys.

“The Queen said it was a wonder that music could be produced from it at all, so little was the care he gave it, and then turned to him with a request for a song.

“Mr. Sleepy Head looked up with a lazy smile as he shook himself and then leaned with his back against the decayed trunk of a tree, while he yawned with outstretched arms. After stamping the drowsiness from his lazy limbs, he gave the old harp a nimble sweep with his dexterous fingers that filled the air with enchanting music; and, smiling again at the children, he proceeded to sing the song of

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THE SAND MAN

“ ‘ Always at evening and every day,
As the shades of the night come down ;
The Sand Man calls good little children away
To the Village of Drowsy Town.
And no sorrow nor care ever entereth there,
But toiling with tireless hand,
He breathes o’er the slumbering children a prayer,
While sowing his sleepy sand.

Chorus.

“ ‘ When the shades of night come down
Over the Village of Drowsy Town,
Children gay drop their play,
And shake a day-day to their mammas :
Off through the meadow with little Bo-Peep,
Helping her gather her wayward sheep,
And praying the Lord their souls to keep,
While visiting Drowsy Town.’

“ When the singer had finished the chorus, he



"He gave the old harp a nimble sweep with his dexterous fingers that filled the air with enchanting music."

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was suddenly overtaken by a fit of sleepiness; and, as his body slipped to one side, he reeled from the tree and fell backward into the gutter with such force that the children instantly sprang to his assistance, for they were sure he was badly hurt. But he managed to stagger again to his feet, and excusing himself for the great impoliteness of falling asleep in company, he again leaned his back to the tree, ran his hand with a magical sweep over the strings of his harp and thus continued his song:

“ ‘The rich and the poor have an equal share,
In the Village of Drowsy Town;
And the poor little orphan receiveth his care
As he maketh his nightly round.
With a sweep of his hand he goes sprinkling sand
As he wanders about through the street,
With a kiss and a smile for each dear little child,
As it falls fast asleep at his feet.

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Chorus.

“ ‘ When the shades of night come down,
Over the Village of Drowsy Town,
Children gay, drop their play,
And shake a day-day to their mammas :
Off through the meadow with little Bo-Peep,
Helping her gather her wayward sheep,
And praying the Lord their souls to keep
While visiting Drowsy Town.’

“ As the last sound of the singer’s voice died on the air, his hands fell limply from the strings of the harp and his eyelids closed with a last, long, weary look. His head fell heavily forward upon his breast, and as his knees gave way beneath him, he slipped slowly to the ground with a loud snore and rolled over on one side, where, with harp in the gutter, Mr. Sleepy Head lay fast asleep.

“ ‘ Well ! ’ exclaimed Arthur, ‘ I’ve often heard

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of such a thing but I never saw anyone really fall asleep before.'

"The good Queen smiled at the bright remark.

" 'Come,' she said. 'Don't disturb him.'

"They tip-toed away from the slumberer and continued on down the street.

"They had not gone very far before they saw a little old man approaching in the distance. He was stooped and bent from the weight of a bag that hung about his neck. Every now and again he would thrust his hand inside, then withdraw it and swing it around as if scattering something over the ground.

" 'There,' exclaimed the Queen, 'is the Sand Man scattering his sand!'

"The children watched the bent form of the Sand Man busily engaged at his toil in the distance; while the entire army of dolls were lying about on the ground, fast asleep at his feet.

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“Both Arthur and Maud wanted to walk over and shake hands with him, but the Queen, knowing how dreadfully sleepy it would make them, turned with a sweet smile as she said:

“‘Do both my darlings want to fall asleep right here in Drowsy Town when we have so many things to see?’

“Without a word of protest they started back toward the landing, upon a different street, as the Queen informed them, than the one on which the home of the Sand Man was located.

“‘Let us walk slowly and talk,’ she said, as she slackened her pace to an easy, ambling gait, ‘for we want to see the dolls get safely aboard their boat and start for home.’

“And now while the Queen and the children are walking slowly through the Village of Drowsy Town, in no great hurry to reach the landing, we will be in no great hurry to continue with the story,

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but will wait while we refresh ourselves with some more water from the well, and at the same time, hear what some of you think of the magical Island of Dreams."

With that the story-teller breathed a deep sigh and sank into total silence.

CHAPTER IX

THE SODA WATER FOUNTAIN

“THAT was a beautiful song the angels sang!” exclaimed one of the little girls as four small boys struggled with three larger ones for possession of the old oaken bucket, and the mossy accumulation on its sides suffered somewhat from the effects of the scramble.

“I like the song of Mr. Sleepy Head best!” exclaimed several at once; and while they were giving their various opinions about different parts of the story, the boys hastened back from the well and joined in the merry chatter.

As they hastily passed the water from one to another, one little fellow exclaimed:

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"Mercy! I can't get over the Valley of Ice Cream and that Mountain of Cake. I just wish we had some of it here!"

"How about the Rock Candy Falls?" asked another.

"They were just grand! just grand!" exclaimed several, almost in one voice. The children now gathered closer than ever about the Vagabond. The little girl on his knee sat holding his hat as thus the "Knight of the Highway" continued:

"As the Queen and the children were walking along on a back street of the village, they met Mr. Sleepy Head again. His harp was hanging far over to one side, and his head was resting heavily upon his breast; while the sound of his loud snoring told them he was fast asleep. Once in a while he would snore so loudly that he wakened himself, when he would again lunge on.

"He had not gone very far when he stumbled

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head first into a tree with a bang that must have hurt him badly; for as he came to with a sudden start, they noticed he rubbed his head with his hands and looked dazedly about as if he had lost his way. Starting forward again, he changed his course and journeyed on toward his master.

“As they passed out of the village, the children were surprised to see a great stream of water, shooting hundreds of feet into the air and tossing its snowy spray about in a wickedly wasteful manner, while the stream seemed to be coming straight up out of the ground.

“As they stopped to look at it, Arthur said he had often seen a waterfall falling down, but had never seen one fall up before. The children were more than delighted with this strange wonder of nature.

“The Queen smiled at Arthur's remark, and turning to the children, said:

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“‘ You know, children, somewhere, way down in the ground, there is a chemical laboratory, the great chemist in charge of which is Mr. Nature. There are not many places where he displays his wonderful ability in such an unusual fashion, but here he seems to have outdone all his other attempts. This is Soda Water Fountain, where day after day, and year after year, he sends forth his exquisite drink to quench the thirst of all weary travellers who visit the Island of Dreams.’

“‘ Soda Water Fountain!’ exclaimed little Maud.

“ And before they could half realize either the immensity of its height or its volume, the Queen led them to where they could drink to their hearts’ content.

“ As they stood drinking and watching the tall stream shoot high into the air, they could not help but ask questions; and, turning to the Queen,

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little Maud wanted to know what sent it up so high.

“ ‘I believe the people of the world call such a display a geyser,’ said the Queen. ‘Several of them are to be found in various parts of the earth. When you have had all you wish to drink, and while we walk slowly back to the landing, I want you to tell me, if you can, where they are located.’

“ ‘They started slowly away on their journey, the children wrapt in deep thought.

“ ‘Little Arthur said he had never been to school much since his mother died, for his old grandfather didn’t believe in schools, and perhaps that was why he did not know more about such wonderful things.

“ ‘The Queen cast a look of pity upon him as she softly said:

“ ‘ ‘Schools are great things, and every little boy and girl ought to learn the lessons well; for the

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world is full of wonderful things, quite as strange and curious, if you understand them, as any you have seen since leaving Harpers Ferry. Every year,' she continued, 'Santa Claus visits a great geyser in Wyoming, located in a place called Yellowstone Park; while in Iceland and New Zealand there are very beautiful geysers indeed, the waters of which are hot enough to cook an egg.'

"While the conversation continued, and the Queen was instructing the children and showing them why it was wise to learn their lessons well, they came in sight of the spot where they first landed upon the island.

"There was a loud commotion down on the shore of the lake, and they were surprised to see all the dolls climbing into their boat. Scarcely had they stopped to view the wonderful and interesting sight than the barque which had borne

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them to the Island of Dreams appeared from a near-by bay and was soon at the landing, awaiting the commands of the Queen.

“The mermaids in charge of the doll-boat had driven their dolphins a short distance from the shore where they lay as if waiting for a race with the Queen’s barque. It was not long before the two boats were resting on the lake side by side.

“Arthur expected every moment to see the waiting dolphins leap forward in a wild effort to surpass each other; but, as there seemed to be no effort made to start them, he soon changed his mind and sat looking upon the plump, round backs of the dolphins as they lay motionless in the lake before them.

“There was a sound of rushing wings high in the air. Again the sky separated as before, and the angels who first welcomed them to the Island of Dreams came falling from the sky.

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“ In the barque of the dolls all was now quiet.

“ There was a sudden outburst of celestial music from a chime of rich-toned bells in the heavens above, and as the angels hovered over the boats, it was thus they sang a parting song :

“ “ Come again to the lake that is crimson and gold,
For the barques ever wait your command ;
The mermaids are true and the dolphins are bold,
To pilot you safe to its strand.
Tell the children of earth that the Island of Mirth,
The one place where the sun ever gleams,
Like a story that's told that will never grow old,
Is the beautiful Island of Dreams.
The Island of Dreams, the Island of Dreams,
Ever gay is the Island of Dreams.

“ “ Come again to the lake that is crimson and gold,
Come again to our heavenly clime ;
Though the ways of the world may be cruel and cold,
It is warm over here all the time.

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When despairing and sad, with no heart to be glad,
And engulfed by the tears that you weep,
Bring your troubles a while to our magical isle,
And the Sand Man will rock them to sleep.
In the Island of Dreams, the Island of Dreams,
The Sand Man will rock them to sleep.'

"No sooner had the angels ceased their beautiful song than they disappeared as quickly as they had come, and there was nothing to be seen but the unbroken arch of the deep blue sky.

"The dolphins shot forward across the lake and bore the dolls away on their homeward journey. As the barque containing the Queen and the children passed leisurely along the shore, they could plainly see the Sand Man, going home after his daily toil with Mr. Sleepy Head stumbling and staggering behind him.

"With a wave of their hands and a blessing upon the wonderful Island of Dreams, the boat

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turned out into the lake and moved rapidly toward the high rock on the distant shore.

“ Kimbo the Giant did not bother them to alight, but placing the palm of his big hand down by the side of the boat, he bade them stand upon it ; then, in a trice, he lifted all three to the top of the high rock for a last, long look on the lake.

“ The dolphins rolled playfully in the tide below. The mermaids waved a bashful adieu ; and then, with a burst of speed, the barque swept like a whirlwind across the lake and was soon lost to sight.

“ The ride on top of the Giant's head back to the throne of the Queen was just as delightful as their former trip through the land of Santa Claus, for Kimbo tried in every possible manner to offer them amusement.

“ Now he would shout ‘ Hold tight ! ’ as he jumped over a tall hill. Then he would give them

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some other warning, as he suddenly leaped from the top of one hill to another, and sailed through the air over the great valley below.

“It was thus he amused the Queen and the children until, with one last mighty leap, he cleared the tall factories of Santa Claus and Taffy River at a single bound and landed them safely upon the golden throne.

“By this time the children had become well acquainted with the Giant, so much so that for some time they stood talking with him. Little Arthur thanked him for the kindness he had shown to both himself and his sister, and as the Giant’s mouth opened for a merry laugh, they noticed that his white snowy teeth resembled, in shape as well as in size, the grave-stones that stood in the village churchyard on the hill at Harpers Ferry. Nor could they suppress their surprise as he raised his enormous hand to bid them good-bye.

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"It was so huge that little Maud could barely clasp her two hands around its little finger. She made a frantic effort to shake the hand up and down, but there wasn't much shake about it. With a merry smile, Kimbo backed away from the throne, bowed low before his Queen, and, with one mighty hop-skip-and-a-jump, he leaped high over a tall mountain and was gone.

"'Come,' said the Queen, as she turned about and placed her finger against a button on the side of her golden chair, 'we will now have some refreshments and then visit the Village of Hide and Seek.'

"So now, while the Queen and the children are waiting to refresh themselves, let us once again send to the well, that we, likewise, may be refreshed before we go with them into the beautiful village."

With that the Vagabond drew a long breath, for

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he had been talking rapidly ; and, as he sank into silence, the happy children gazed upon him with a feeling of pride that had slowly grown from dread to friendship and almost to love.

CHAPTER X

IN THE VILLAGE OF HIDE AND SEEK

A GENERAL burst of applause greeted the ears of the story teller as he ceased speaking and sank into silence. All the boys now rose with merry faces and surrounding the old oaken bucket, journeyed together to the old well, while the little girls sat gazing intently upon the stranger, as if he were the greatest man in the whole world.

One little girl whispered to another little girl that some day he might be President of the United States, but the other little girl gave it as her honest opinion that he should have been long ago. Many of the others were now almost as much interested in the man as in his wonderful story.

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A little girl asked him if Harpers Ferry was very far from there ; while another wanted to know if he could call around the next day for she was anxious to introduce him to her father and mother, who, she declared, would be more than delighted to meet him.

The Vagabond's only answer to all was a good-natured smile. When the water arrived, and it had been passed around to the children, the Vagabond helped himself to his heart's content, after which he proceeded to tell the last of his story.

"The Queen did not have to wait long after pressing the button, for it rang a bell that summoned into her presence a finely liveried butler, who, when he learned the wants of Her Royal Highness, glided silently down the steps of the throne. Presently two court attendants entered, bearing a tray on which were a number of glasses filled with a fluid referred to by the Queen as Nec-

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tar; although, as Maud said, it was too good for language to describe. Shortly after the refreshment they started to visit the Village of Hide and Seek.

“When they were part way down the steps some little doll in the village spread the news of their coming, and all the dolls, almost wild with joy, dropped their playthings and flocked to meet them.

“The Queen and the children followed a beautiful, pebbly path that led through an orchard lying to the north of the village, for they wanted to enter upon the main street; and as they went slowly along they passed beneath boughs laden almost to breaking with ripe, mellow chocolate drops, while the path was lined on either side with bushes where great, rich, juicy clusters of gum drops hung, ready to fall to the ground.

“They were soon joined by the romping dolls,

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and together they walked down the main street to the public square and paused in front of the beautiful Temple of Music.

“Dolls with bright, rosy cheeks came running as if almost wild to meet them. Some had azure eyes and light golden hair: while others, with dark piercing eyes and long raven locks might put to blush the fairest picture ever drawn.

“They gathered around little Maud, and pulling at the hem of her dress, begged to be taken into her arms. At last she lifted a flaxen-haired beauty from the ground, and with a sweet, satisfied smile upon its face, it laid its head lovingly upon her breast as it said in a contented half-whisper:

“‘Please be my mamma, please be my mamma.’

“Then a thousand sweet doll-baby voices cried out in chorus:

“‘No, she shall be my mamma. She shall be my mamma.’

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“ And they raised such a hue and cry and scrambled so to get hold of her dress, that in order not to be partial, she had to let the little beauty down again on to the ground.

“ Amid the wild excitement of the dolls, Arthur was not alone. He stood to one side watching a little doll that was lying under a tree and talking with some other little dolls standing near by.

“ Its eyelids were wide open, yet its eyes had an unnatural expression. For a long time he regarded her pityingly when he saw that the doll was blind. A strange manly-looking doll walked up to him, and, peering into his face, exclaimed :

“ ‘ Seeing you are a stranger, sir, in the village of Hide and Seek, and noting your apparent sympathy for the blind doll lying yonder under the tree, allow me to tell you the life story of her who has so touched your emotions. Arthur bowed

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politely and expressed a desire to hear what the strange doll might have to say. The little fellow continued :

“ ‘ Perhaps you have noticed by my long hair and studious demeanor that I am both a gentleman and a scholar ; and right here let me say, I am the Village Poet. I can converse much more easily in verse than in prose ; so if you will kindly listen to me for a moment, I will relate a little circumstance which occurred some time ago, and will tell you the plain, unvarnished truth about the blind doll.’

“ Resting for a moment, for he did not appear to be very strong, he breathed a long sigh as he began :

“ ‘ Once on a time a Baboon came across yon mountain crown.
He sailed down in a big balloon and landed near the town ;
And seeing, as he walked along, this blind doll lying near,
He paused to say a kindly word, or shed a gentle tear.



*"Perhaps you have noticed by my long hair and studious demeanor
that I am both a gentleman and a scholar."*

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“ ‘Why is it, little doll?’ he asked, ‘you lie here all the day,
Instead of romping on the green, like other dolls at play?
And why avoid the jolly crowd, pray tell me if you will,
Is it that you thus like to be, or is it you are ill?’ ”

“ ‘Oh, sir,’ the little doll replied, ‘you’re surely more than kind,
But look at me and you will see that I, alas, am blind;
And thus all day I keep away, nor venture near the throng,
For not a friend a hand will lend to guide my feet along.’ ”

“ ‘The Baboon picked the blind doll up and stared with all his
might.

‘Pray, tell me Dolly,’ he inquired, ‘how did you lose your
sight?’ ”

‘Alas, kind sir, my sightless eyes, I strained them in a fog,
A-looking for a Christmas gift from Mother Hubbard’s dog.’ ”

“ ‘Then up spoke Simple Simon, and with utterance unkind
He cried, ‘This doll who falsifies is lazy and not blind.
I’ll prove my words,’ but ere he could, to everyone’s surprise,
The Baboon pulled his anchor up and sailed off through the
skies.

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“ ‘ Poor Simple Simon, he was right. This doll is only blind
When lying flat upon its back, or partly so inclined ;
But if you make it sit up straight, you’ll find his words are
true,
For then the sleepy-headed Doll can see as well as you.’ ”

“ Little Arthur walked over to the doll and lifted it into a sitting position. It opened its eyes at once and looked squarely into his own. Uttering a word of surprise to his poet friend, they walked away from the blind doll together and passed down the street.

“ When they had nearly crossed the square, the Poet Doll bade him ‘ Good day ’ and entered a house on the corner which Arthur concluded to be the Poet’s home. He found himself standing near a curious, round-faced boy-doll, who was looking on the gathering in silence. His head was so close shaven that he was almost bald, except for a long queue extending far down his back like a pig-tail,

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while his little black almond-shaped eyes sat well aslant on his head.

“Arthur thought he would speak first; and, turning to the little fellow, he said :

“‘Excuse me, my little man, this is a most lovely village. Do you live here?’

“There was a moment’s pause and a look of bashfulness upon the boy-doll’s face, as, with a courteous bow and the politeness of a prince, it said in reply:

“‘I humbly beg your honorable pardon, sir, but, as my education in foreign languages was sadly neglected, I most heartily deplore the deficiency and am quite sorry to inform you that I do not speak your honorable language as I understand nothing but Chinese.’

“Arthur, seeing his mistake, retired with a most polite bow and went over to another little doll that spoke English.

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“‘Come,’ exclaimed this new found acquaintance in a quite familiar manner, ‘let us play a game of hide and seek. I know a dandy place to hide.’

“‘All right, sir,’ said Arthur, joyfully; ‘but first let me tell my sister about it for she dearly loves to play.’

And the two walked hand in hand to where Maud stood surrounded by a multitude of little dolls.

“As Arthur watched and listened, waiting to get an audience with his sister, he overheard one little doll say to her:

“‘When did you come here?’

“‘To-day,’ replied Maud, then added, ‘but if I had only known the way, I would have been here long ago. I am so sorry that I must soon leave.’

“‘Where are you going?’ another doll shyly inquired.

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“ ‘Going home,’ replied Maud, with a deep sigh.

“All the little beauties looked up into her face as if greatly bewildered.

“ ‘What does she mean?’ asked one of the dolls of her companions. ‘What is home?’ And it arose on tip-toes to look into her face.

“ ‘My home,’ replied little Maud, ‘is down in Harpers Ferry on the Shenandoah River.’

“ ‘River!’ a doll repeated. ‘Harpers Ferry!’ And it turned a bewildered look upon the rest of the assembled dolls standing in questioning silence before her.

“Maud soon realized that the dolls failed to understand her, and, wishing to make herself understood, she gazed wistfully over the gathering of bright faces, as she said:

“ ‘I live in one of the most beautiful places in the world.’

“Before she could finish what she wished to say,

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however, one little doll way back in the multitude spoke up, saying :

“ ‘World, did she say? Why, I have often heard Santa Claus speak of that place.’

“ All the dolls turned their attention from Maud to the little speaker. They assisted their little companion up on to the bottom of an inverted tin sand pail that she might be seen as well as heard ; when with a bashful bow, she said :

“ ‘The world, playmates, is the place where mothers die and leave their little children all alone.’

“ With a leap from the sand pail, the little speaker disappeared in the assemblage of dolls. Instantly all turned to Maud with an inquiring look. There was an expression of doubt upon their little faces and they were now more than anxious for her to speak.

“ ‘Yes,’ she replied, ‘alas ! That is only too true.’

“ And she breathed a sorrowful sigh as she

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thought of her mamma who had been dead for two long years, and of how she had nestled close in her loving arms waiting for Santa Claus to come, only three nights before she passed away.

“She glanced into the sad face of her orphan brother standing near, and down in her little heart there came a sad longing for the sound of that sweet mother’s gentle voice, with its tender words of love and nightly prayer.

“Again the happy days, now gone forever, came back to her childish memory ; and the soft song of her mother ‘stole into her soul with a charming lullaby. Again she felt the warm, fervent kiss on her cheek, as in fancy she heard her mother whisper a last ‘Good night.’

“A sob burst from her sweet lips. A tear rose to her eye and stood trembling upon the long black lashes. Another followed and crowded it from its place to the ground.

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“The Queen drew back horror-struck, for the Heaven-forbidden drop of water had at last fallen upon Beauty Valley.

“A sudden chorus of wild screams rent the air. There was a terrible shock, an upheaval, as if from an earthquake. The very ground trembled as if in a fit of convulsions. Sharp, darting pains struck the children mercilessly down into a state of insensibility. All then grew silent as death and pitch dark.

“In a few moments the shrill whistle of a train resounded through the Shenandoah Valley, as it dashed out of the tunnel in the mountain and on over the great steel bridge into Harpers Ferry.

“Little Maud, wakened by the echoing tumult, gazed in a bewildered manner about her. There lay her brother asleep upon the green mound, under the same tree where they had first met

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‘Aunt Twaddles.’ She placed her hand tenderly upon him, and he awoke with a sudden start.

“‘Oh, Maudie!’ he exclaimed, ‘what happened that it grew dark so suddenly?’

“The boy half arose as he received only a sob in reply, and you can well imagine his surprise as he gazed about; for there at his side lay a huge pile of freshly picked pennyroyal on the very top of which was a snow white card. The card was most beautifully embossed with a picture of the Village of Hide and Seek, and, in the handwriting of ‘Aunt Twaddles,’ it bore the following inscription :

“ To my darling Children :

*Remember always that, as you saw a tear
destroy a realm of joy, so can a spirit of discontent destroy a life of
useful happiness.*

Yours very lovingly,

‘ Twaddles, the Queen of the Dolls. ’

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“ ‘Oh, Arthur!’ exclaimed Maud, ‘hurry and don’t think of it any more.’

“And the two children gathered up as much of the pennyroyal as each could possibly carry and hurried across the long footbridge into the village.

“Men, women and children ran to greet them with tears of joy in their eyes. With strong arms they bore them and their pennyroyal into the Inn, where the stern, scolding, old inn-keeper stood ready to whip them, but the sight of the pennyroyal caused him to relent.

“On the afternoon of the following day, Arthur and his little sister were seated all alone on the bank of the Shenandoah, looking far across upon the steep path that led straight up the face of the mountain. Their little elbows were planted firmly upon their knees, their chins sunk deeply into the palms of their wide-open hands. For a long time they sat motionless, thinking no doubt of their

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wonderful journey. Little Arthur finally broke the silence.

“ ‘Maud!’ he exclaimed, in a tone deeply touched with emotion.

“ ‘What is it, Arthur?’ she replied, with a sob.

“ ‘Maud,’ he repeated, ‘I was just wishing that that big mountain over yonder, right under Taffy River, would spring a leak.’

“For a long time they sat weeping and thinking of it; nor is there any doubt that they wept over it until far into the night, when they fell asleep and forgot about it.

“This then is the story, my children, of the strange path on the side of the mountain that lies like a scar on the face of the cliff; and many are the old settlers thereabout who will vouch for the truth of my tale.

“It is needless to prove true what is true; still if there is any feeling of doubt in your hearts, just

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stand on the banks of the fair Shenandoah almost any warm morning in springtime, and no doubt you will see 'Aunt Twaddles' slowly ascending the path with her big bag of herbs.

"But if you should happen to miss her, and still want some proof of these facts, just keep a close watch on the strangers who step from the trains when they stop at the little stone station. If you see them wiping their eyes with a handkerchief and gazing about on the surrounding mountains, you may be sure they have once eaten some of 'Aunt Twaddles' candy and are wiping the tears from their eyes and crying like children for more.

"At the same time you will see them looking about on the cliffs, and searching for the steep path that leads up to the Village of Hide and Seek, quite firmly resolved at some future day to return and go up with 'Aunt Twaddles.' But for the present, (poor things), their only hope is to go

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back into the cars and cry until they forget about it.

“There are many more wonderful things I might tell you of the Village of Hide and Seek, and likewise to the everlasting glory of ‘Aunt Twaddles’ candy as well, but the very thought of it makes me feel sad; for now as I talk, I feel tears coming to my eyes and find I must either talk on and cry on, or quit talking and forget about it.

“Excuse me, dear children, won’t you, while I weep?”

As the Vagabond ceased speaking the tears flowed down his cheeks in a perfect torrent; and although the children were delighted with his story, they too wept in sympathy with him. The very loudest of all was the dear little tot who had occupied the place of honor on his knee.

While the group of children sat weeping in sympathy under the tree, the Vagabond arose.

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Bidding them all farewell, he placed his old, worn-out hat on his head, shouldered his crooked staff, waved a parting blessing toward the well on the lawn, and still weeping, passed out of sight along the dusty highway.

THE END.

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